



# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

**THE SMOOTH OPERATOR: UNDERSTANDING CROSS-  
CULTURAL INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN SPECIAL  
OPERATIONS**

by

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December 2014

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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Global SOF partnership is a major focus of U.S. Special Operations Command, and the United States Army Special Operations Command recognizes its force as the best-suited element in the U.S. Army to operate within the human domain. U.S. Army Special Forces are the military's experts in unconventional warfare. Accomplishment of these missions is heavily reliant on success at the cross-cultural, interpersonal level. Each special operator, regardless of unit, needs to navigate organizational and cultural boundaries effectively in order to achieve unity of effort and improve chances for mission success.

This research places emphasis on U.S. Army Special Forces specifically, and the USSOCOM force more generally. Selection and training programs are discussed to illustrate current efforts to develop cross-cultural, interpersonal skill sets, along with the potential to enhance them. This effort, drawn from interviews, identifies themes advanced by deployed special operators. The conclusion provides recommendations for training and sustainment of the requisite cross-cultural interpersonal skills needed for success, with the intent of enhancing the individual operator's ability to excel in complex interpersonal engagements.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

18A	Special Forces officer
18B	Special Forces weapons NCO
18C	Special Forces engineer NCO
18D	Special Forces medical NCO
18E	Special Forces communications NCO
AOR	area of responsibility
ASOTC	Advanced Special Operations Training Course
ARI	Army Research Institute
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CG	commanding general
CN	counter narcotics
COIN	counterinsurgency
COM	chief of mission
CPT	captain
CT	counterterrorism
CTR	close target reconnaissance
DA	direct action
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FID	foreign internal defense
FOB	forward operating base
HN	host nation
IA	interagency
JCET	Joint Combined Exchange for Training
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
JSOTF	Joint Special Operations Task Force

KLE	key leader engagement
LET	live environment training
LTC	lieutenant colonel
MAJ	major
MARSOC	Marine Special Operations Command
MLE	military liaison element
MOS	military occupational specialty
MTT	mobile training team
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
NSW	Naval Special Warfare
ODA	Operational Detachment-Alpha
OCS	Officer Candidate School
PCS	primary change of station
POI	program of instruction
PMT	pre-mission training
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
SERE	survival, escape, resistance, and evasion
SF	Special Forces
SFAS	Special Forces Assessment and Selection
SFAUC	Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat
SFQC	Special Force Qualification Course
SMT	social movement theory
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SR	special reconnaissance
SWAT	special weapons and tactics
TF	task force
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command

TQ	tactical questioning
UW	Unconventional Warfare
USG	United States Government
USASFC	United States Army Special Forces Command
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
VSO	Village Stability Operations

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Special operators are often regarded as the smart, hard-hitting, precision arm of the U.S. military; they think first, yet deliver a strong punch when necessity dictates. Over the last ten years, Special Operations Forces (SOF) teams have proved time and again their tactical superiority and adaptability under the worst circumstances. There is little doubt these men can shoot, move, and communicate with a high level of precision. Their skills are constantly enhanced through never-ending training in shooting, breaching, tactical medicine, communications, vehicle drills, planning, and the like. Proficiency in these skills is maintained through “assessment events” before each deployment.

Intense training cycles are thus both necessary and relevant. However, they bring to mind a serious question as SOF strives to maintain competent, well-rounded, adequately prepared operators. Are these training iterations satisfactory in the context of preparing for current and future employment of SOF elements? This thesis argues that they leave a crucial void in SOF’s level of preparedness, specifically in the realm of human interaction. SOF elements routinely deploy with a complete array of tactical training, but little-to-no related preparation in the realm of interpersonal skills and negotiation. For example, this author has spoken with various Army Special Forces (SF) operators regarding their recent and concurrent pre-mission training (PMT) for village or district stability operations (VSO) in Afghanistan. VSO is an assignment quite overtly focused on effectively influencing host-nation (HN) government, military, and civilian personnel; yet, after ten years of counterinsurgency (COIN) practice, the common focus of PMT remains advanced urban combat, tactical medicine, and vehicle operations.

In other words, SOF tends to train the least for what it uses the most. Let us consider some factors that reinforce the legitimacy of these skills. Currently, the primary focus for United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is global SOF partnership. The United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) stands as the lead element in developing an Army

warfighting function relevant to the human domain, while also enhancing its capabilities in the execution of special warfare and the subset of unconventional warfare (UW). Furthermore, members of the U.S. Army Special Forces community have a time-tested history as UW practitioners. Special Forces operators also serve as instructors or advisors who conduct other aspects of military operations working with and through foreign partners. In this regard, instead of taking a unilateral American approach, the United States Government (USG) often employs SOF to work in this inter-cultural realm for a range of reasons, from political sensitivity to economy of force. As such, the need for operators to master cross-cultural interpersonal skills is driven by our nation's desire to employ SOF as an indirect approach to achieving national strategic objectives.

Each of the aforementioned arguments supporting the use of SOF assets in sensitive cross-cultural and interpersonal missions underscores the necessity of selecting and training men who can hit with precision and aggression one minute, yet turn the emotional dial and broker relations with friend or foe in the next. SOF continually operates in over 70 foreign countries, navigating the cultural and linguistic mazes associated with managing relations with myriad U.S. partner organizations from agencies to NGOs. These dynamics illustrate the value of enhancing SOF's cross-cultural interpersonal and negotiation skills. These skills equip the SOF operator to more effectively influence others to achieve his goals, whether those "others" refer to a partner unit or organization, an agent at the rental car desk, or a vendor delivering gear or services the team requires.

Each SF team, MARSOC team, Special Tactics team, or SEAL platoon will possess a wide range of skills and personalities, with different individuals best suited to different situations. Likewise, many of SOF's most respected and combat-accomplished leaders are uncomfortable and/or under-qualified to sit for tea with a village elder or chat with an ambassador. Most teams know exactly who those individuals are and tend to steer them away from such engagements.

Appropriately designed and implemented training can increase an individual's skills to a degree that he is capable of maintaining important cross-cultural relationships for the duration of an assignment requiring interpersonal skills. This thesis contends that such training is necessary for all special operators.

To demonstrate that a deliberate improvement in interpersonal skills is worth the effort, the following example is offered from the author's personal experience as a team leader:

At one point, the author's team was deployed overseas advising two foreign infantry brigades and provincial police elements in the conduct of COIN. In that context the team had various support elements subordinate to the detachment. Operating across a large area required a good deal of task organization; the Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) carried the brunt of this workload and were task-organized to work with U.S. partners and specific Host Nation elements in executing the plan. In this capacity, one of the NCOs was supervising a support element in coordinating certain activities for his sector of the Area of Operations aligned with a HN infantry battalion. This NCO was one of the most tactically and technically savvy men on the team and had earned the respect of the team sergeant and men on a preceding combat deployment. He fit the SOF profile of an intelligent but aggressive Soldier, with little patience for those who didn't measure up to his standards. Within the team he was perceived as exceptionally abrasive, a distinction he proudly embraced.

One evening when discussing with the author the work at hand, the NCO commented that he wasn't gaining the level of performance he expected from his support element. Further, he considered them weak and soft, and believed he might achieve better results doing the work himself. Having previously observed this NCO's work with the same support element, the author speculated he was intimidating them with his aggressive, intense approach, rather than creating an opportunity for the young soldiers who comprised the support element and looked up to this NCO to learn from him more collegially. The author therefore suggested that the NCO step out of normal character and approach these subordinates on a more friendly and less directive level, as this might allow him to influence their work to a greater extent. If after a couple days this approach did not appear to be having the desired impact, the NCO would be free to report those results and return to conducting business as he saw fit.

The change in demeanor accrued immediate benefits. Upon the NCO's return a few days later, he reported that this unfamiliar advice had "worked great" and had initiated a positive turnaround in his relationship with the support element.

This encounter suggests that even SOF operators perceived as lacking strong interpersonal and cross-cultural skills are capable, *when warranted and desired*, of changing their approach.

SOF needs professionals who are willing to work through organizational cultural barriers. SOF's mission success critically depends on operators' abilities to transition along the spectrum of interpersonal presentation—from aggressive, directive interactions to carefully circumscribed diplomatic exchanges—to a degree sufficient to maintain relationships that directly enable various types of cooperation and coordination.

This thesis is an attempt to provide hard-hitting, fast-moving operators with another edge or tactic that can facilitate their success. In drawing upon real examples, it is designed to offer a different approach to achieving mission accomplishment.

## **A. SUMMARY OF KEY SECTIONS**

This research focuses on delivering a tangible, practical research product in order to assist operators in the execution of full spectrum SOF operations.

Chapter II reviews the value of cross-cultural interpersonal skills for U.S. Army Special Forces and SOF as a whole by discussing the utility of such skills within the scope of common missions and priorities for the way ahead. The latter section examines current procedures for selecting, training, and maintaining these skills within the context of the U.S. Army Special Forces, while also outlining areas of potential enhancement.

Chapter III focuses on the methodology employed for this project and explains how this thesis explores the problem set of poor cross-cultural interpersonal skills in SOF. It outlines the process for dissecting a series of

successful and unsuccessful concrete, interpersonal engagements conducted by SOF operators (SF, SEAL, Ranger, JSOC) working in 22 countries and the U.S. on a wide range of missions. The specific methodology employed involves analyzing operators' responses in order to identify and correlating themes within a series of firsthand interviews.

Chapter IV presents correlational, recurring themes derived from the coding and analysis of operators' vignettes. The intent is to leverage real-world examples extracted from interviews to highlight commonalities within both the broader context in which the individual scenarios took place, as well as within the realm of human dynamics exhibited by the operators themselves under certain circumstances. The final section of Chapter IV offers a process for noting and responding to key behavioral and situational trends that dictate certain adjustments in order for interpersonal success to be obtained in a cross-cultural or inter-organizational environment.

Chapter V offers concluding comments and recommendations for improving these skills within both the Special Forces community and SOF at large.

Appendix A expands on examples of the coding process from Chapter III by presenting similar data for the remaining themes identified during research.

Appendix B contains supplemental figures with complete data on interview subjects and story outcomes.

Appendix C contains a brief recommended reading list for the topics touched upon throughout this document.

Appendix D contains the academic literature review concerning the underlying theory and research behind cross-cultural interpersonal skills or negotiation and the research methodology.

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## **II. OPERATIONAL UTILITY AND CURRENT TRAINING EFFORTS**

This chapter illustrates the value of cross-cultural interpersonal skills to Special Forces and SOF by identifying common missions and related core tasks. It then reviews current efforts toward personnel selection, training, and skill maintenance within Special Forces specifically.

### **A. VALUE OF THE INTERPERSONAL OPERATOR**

#### **1. Global SOF Partnership**

USSOCOM is currently focusing long-term attention on building international SOF relationships and depth of influence through global SOF partnerships. This process will only intensify as the USSOCOM J7, Force Management and Development, initiates Joint Collective Training venues through exercises and training with partner nations.<sup>1</sup> As our force expands the global SOF network with enhanced opportunities for training and forward deployed service, the success of these macro-level partnerships will depend on the cross-cultural interpersonal skills possessed by SOF professionals and employed at the micro-level.

#### **2. Unconventional Warfare**

Unconventional warfare (UW), the primary trade or “bread and butter” of Army Special Forces, is defined by USASOC as follows:

Unconventional Warfare: Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary and guerrilla force in a denied area.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William R. McRaven, “USSOCOM Commander’s Training and Education Guidance, Fiscal Years 2014-17,” (MacDill AFB, FL: United States Special Operations Command, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command, “ARSOF 2022,” *Special Warfare* 26, no. 2 (2013): 10.

As the definition suggests, most activities falling under the UW umbrella involve operating with or through partners in order to manipulate foreign political and human terrain in sensitive, high-risk environments. This thesis asserts, however, that real influence cannot be bought, especially under conditions where survival is at stake; rather, it is earned through genuine human trust. Social movement theory (SMT), a crucial tool in executing successful UW, similarly relies on building high leverage relationships throughout the target populace in key nodes. SMT involves determining what groups impact critical swaths of a given population, embedding with these groups, identifying an internal influencer, gaining that influencer's trust, and using that trust to garner support of the larger entity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, SMT relies on strategic framing and messaging, both of which require attaining the perspective of the target audience. As such, successful UW necessitates direct interpersonal influence and the acquisition of sufficient local perspective to impact decision-making on a wide scale. This will not occur unless operators are adept at building cross-cultural interpersonal relationships.

### **3. Foreign Internal Defense and Other Foreign Training**

Foreign internal defense (FID) and foreign training supporting counterterrorism (CT), or counter narcotics (CN), are routine SOF missions conducted in many countries around the world. The operators interviewed for this thesis alone have collectively conducted such missions in 19 separate countries. With few exceptions, units executing these assignments work under the chief of mission's (COM) authority, or with his or her concurrence, and coordinate or directly partner with various subordinate offices and agencies.

These missions compel operators to wear multiple hats, both literally and figuratively, as they traverse the engagement spectrum from training or meeting with locals to briefing an ambassador. To navigate this reality, SOF needs

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<sup>3</sup> Doowan Lee, "DA3800: Seminar on Social Movements and Unconventional Warfare" (lecture at Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, July 2013).

operators who can collaborate and influence within various domains. The communication style used with a fellow HN operator may be inappropriate inside the embassy gates, but encountering the juxtaposition of these contexts in a single day's work is likely, if not assured, for operators assuming these mission sets. And while some of the most valuable lessons captured during research for this thesis were gleaned through descriptions of failure in a combat environment, historical and political sensitivities are unlikely to permit the same margin of error with regard to interpersonal engagements that U.S. forces experienced in Iraq or Afghanistan. Future cross-cultural scenarios will demand solutions informed by both interpersonal and kinetic approaches.

#### **4. Special Reconnaissance and Direct Action**

Some within the special operations community might consider special reconnaissance (SR) and direct action (DA) as core tasks void of any need for interpersonal skills. Yet the 20 operators interviewed for this research from SF, SEAL, Ranger, and JSOC organizations indicated otherwise. Every one mentioned influencing HN or U.S. partners in the planning or execution of SR or DA missions. Some operators facilitated the training and execution of police and military missions in combat; others worked with partner nation organizations focused on CT or CN work. These operators' experiences suggest a broader trend in which unilateral SOF operations are becoming less common.

When unilateral missions do occur, they are nevertheless increasingly collaborative and routinely require the tailored application of interpersonal skills in one or more phase. Some examples of these operations include Interagency (IA) collaboration, joint coordination, mission infiltration, close target reconnaissance (CTR), responding to compromised SR positions, and tactical questioning (TQ). In each of these, effective communication is achieved through the combination of an operator's accurate reading of the interpersonal dynamics in the given situation, and his subsequent application of an appropriate approach. For example, the following experience illustrates a post-assault TQ where flexible

interpersonal skills made the difference between one Soldier's task achievement and another's failure. This situation occurred when a partner agency was no longer able to support missions, requiring unit members to handle this task:

He [the Soldier conducting TQ] had a very good demeanor about it. On occasion he would even [be] laughing at the guy [the captured insurgent] and some of the answers he would be given, just basic standard stuff. But another guy, different platoon, in his questioning [was] just not very good, not naturally inclined to do well. Every other answer that was given to him, [he] was like, 'You are lying.' Then he moves to the next question and continued to go, 'You are lying.' The guy who was not so good, he was trying to be the dominant figure and [trying] to establish himself early on with who he was questioning. It was almost counterproductive, whereas the guy that was good at it was very nonchalant. He would put his dip in, kind of have his nods up and just hang out with the guy.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, the unsuccessful Soldier used a less flexible, more aggressive, approach. Following a night tactical entry, such an approach exacerbated an already elevated level of tension and further restricted the opportunity to successfully extract necessary information. Conversely, the more successful Soldier employed a calm, humorous approach in an effort to reduce the inherent tension and develop a dialogue. His approach allowed a more friendly elicitation, whereas the former Soldier's engagement was decidedly a form of interrogation. Creating a space of reduced stress for dialogue, even in the tactical context, can be crucial for success. Understandably, skills and abilities differ and some SOF operators will adapt more readily to the demands of such interactions than others. Nonetheless, these variances should not preclude SOF from offering more opportunities for operators to understand the value in different approaches.

## **5. U.S. Partnership Roles**

Today, SOF rarely acts without involving various U.S. partners in some capacity. Eighteen of the 20 operators interviewed in this thesis alone generated 113 examples of situations in which they were required to influence U.S.

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<sup>4</sup> Subject 15, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 15, 2013).

partners. Twenty-four of the 96 stories collected directly focused on U.S. influence. Nine of these, more than 37 percent, reflect failed attempts. 72 stories accounted for influence with foreign partners; 18 of these, or 25 percent, had a negative outcome. Remarkably, this demonstrates a higher rate of failure in interpersonal negotiations involving other U.S. partners than those involving foreign partners.

Common examples of engagements requiring SOF operators to influence other Americans include interactions with conventional forces, government agencies, political offices, non-government organizations (NGO), and civilians in academia and business, among others. The situation usually dictates that operators enter the “other’s” space: SOF conduct missions in conventional commanders’ Area(s) of Responsibility (AOR), serve in military liaison elements (MLE) on temporary duty (TDY), conduct training on Joint Combined Exchange(s) for Training (JCET) under COM authority, or are detailed to various IA or joint staff positions. SOF’s wide range of partner organizations necessitate that SOF elements be capable of projecting their needs flexibly and in a manner that aligns with the partner or partners at hand.

## **B. SELECTION, TRAINING, AND SKILLS MAINTENANCE**

Special Forces and SOF at large are well known for their stringent training qualifications. At times this reputation helps to establish initial credibility with partners. As an adaptive, results-driven organization, SOF constantly seeks to enhance its methods of selecting, training, and maintaining the force. In light of this cultural emphasis on continual process improvement, the next section will review current Special Forces selection and training methodologies related to the cross-cultural interpersonal realm so as to highlight successful practices and identify opportunities for improvement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The following information was accurate as of October 2013. The Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) process outlined was initiated in February of 2012.

## 1. Special Forces Assessment and Selection

Also known as SFAS, this 19-day course is designed to assess whether volunteers have the mental and physical capability to both complete the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) and to subsequently serve in the Special Forces Regiment.<sup>6</sup> SFAS uses the Assessment Center Method to select personnel based on specified role requirements.<sup>7</sup> This method is tied to original research on assessment and selection conducted by the Office of Strategic Studies.<sup>8</sup> The SFAS Assessment Center determines the knowledge, skills, and abilities candidates must possess to complete training and serve at the unit level. The Center also defines corresponding intellectual and physical baselines, and then identifies psychological tests, individual events, and job-related team scenarios to use as the platform for analysis. This entire process constantly evolves to increase the accuracy of assessments and to reduce candidates' abilities to game the course by using information garnered from previous attendees.

Within this process, candidates are evaluated based on the "whole man" concept, a set of Army Special Operations attributes drawn from surveys of senior leaders in the SF regiment and historical SF models. The heart of this process is Team Week, involving a series of job-related tasks that combine physical and cognitive challenges in a leaderless environment.

The hierarchical nature of the military tends, over time, to encourage its members, toward polarized roles: individuals either take charge, or subordinate themselves to leadership. But this dichotomy does not always maximize group

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<sup>6</sup> Data in this selection was collected during a visit to Camp Mackall for the SFAS class held in October of 2013. Comments were drawn from notes made during observation of training and interface with cadre. This trip was conducted strictly to collect factual information concerning current execution of SFAS and the SFQC.

<sup>7</sup> William C. Byham, "The Assessment Center Method and Methodology: New Applications and Technologies," *Development Dimensions International Monograph* (1986), accessed November 20, 2013, [https://www.ddiworld.com/DDIWorld/media/white-papers/AssessmentCenterMethods\\_mg\\_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.ddiworld.com/DDIWorld/media/white-papers/AssessmentCenterMethods_mg_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> United States, Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1958), 26–57.

dialogue and input. On a 12-man SF Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA), the opinion of every individual counts; the smaller, flatter organizational construct means that each man is responsible for contributing thoughtful analysis and input to team decisions. As such, Team Week introduces a leaderless environment to highlight how well individuals work in a flattened democratic setting, while also facilitating better identification of the emotionally intelligent leaders and team players. The question underlying Team Week is this: with no rank or position provided beyond a random roster number, can men rise to the occasion under physical and mental duress, build camaraderie with their peers, and influence their decision-making? Activities are monitored by fellow candidates, multiple cadre, and the participants themselves, allowing for a comprehensive 360-degree analysis.

Such an inclusive approach to analysis is a recent development involving constant changes and inputs. The assessed events are largely designed and managed by SF NCOs, who comprise most of the SFAS team. Team Week promotes the selection of candidates with a higher baseline level of individual competence, upon which further training and exposure can build. The primary trait requiring improvement, both at selection and beyond, is the cross-cultural aspect of interpersonal skills. Despite the relative effectiveness of SFAS in selecting qualified SF candidates, the SFAS process continues to focus on assessing interpersonal competence as defined within the U.S. Army's cultural domain. Psychological research indicates, however—as Chapter IV of this document affirms—that cross-cultural interpersonal engagements are consistently characterized by a higher level of complexity than intra-cultural events. This points to an inherent but equally correctable weakness in the SFAS methodology.

## 2. Special Forces Qualification Course

Figure 1 below outlines the six major phases of training within the SFQC. This section will briefly describe efforts to build cross-cultural interpersonal skills in phases that apply.



Figure 1. Special Forces Qualification Course Overview<sup>9</sup>

Of note, instructors in all phases of training can access the collective ratings and evaluations of each student, such that positive or negative trends in behavior observed by cadre and peers can be addressed. This practice underscores a key area of focus for SF NCOs running the course, which is monitoring students' interactions with fellow trainees, cadre (civilian or military), and role players. In this vein, student peer evaluations are conducted at several

<sup>9</sup> Slide provided by 1st Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), Camp Mackall, November 26, 2013.

junctions throughout training. These assist in identifying individuals who may have issues serving on an SF team or in the SOF operational realm at large.

***a. SFQC Phase I Review***

Several phases of the course place attention on interpersonal skills. Phase I, Course Orientation and History, offers two forms of exposure. First, students act as foreign guerrilla role players for the culmination exercise known as Robin Sage or Phase IV. Here, a student ODA in Phase IV is paired with a group of Phase I students acting as guerillas, and the Phase IV student ODA is tasked to conduct a U.S.-supported insurgency campaign to overthrow the foreign guerillas' corrupt regime. This requires Phase I students to act as insurgents in a fictitious country while being advised by a student ODA. Role-playing characters possessing different cultural norms challenges Phase I students to gain the perspective of the same stakeholders they will need to influence when they return to this exercise as ODA participants in Phase IV. By observing the group dynamics and cross-cultural interpersonal communication techniques employed by the student ODA with which they are matched, Phase I students also glimpse what will be expected of them as they progress in the course, and they can learn from other students' successes and failures. Later in Phase I, students receive initial classes on negotiation and mediation. Collectively, therefore, this phase provides exposure to a simulated foreign culture and baseline negotiation theory.

***b. SFQC Phase II Review***

Phase II, Individual Training, includes the Level C (High Risk) Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) Course. Focusing on war as well as peacetime captivity and hostage detention, this course provides instruction on how to assess and influence a captor under a range of operational circumstances. As such, this phase delivers ample opportunity for the practical exercise of interpersonal and negotiation skills, building on the exposures of Phase I. This is a valued learning opportunity, but also involves a witting partner.

**c. *SFQC Phase III Review***

Phase III focuses on producing SFQC graduates trained in one of five initial Special Forces military occupational specialties (MOS): SF officer (18A), SF weapons NCO (18B), SF engineer NCO (18C), SF medical NCO (18D), and SF communications NCO (18E). As such, the courses included in this phase are primarily geared toward teaching the unique technical skills required for those respective jobs. Two examples that place some emphasis on interpersonal competence are the 18A and 18D courses.

The 18A course focuses specific effort towards enhancing students' skills through negotiation and elicitation training, delivering briefings to senior leaders, and participating in practical training exercises. The interagency perspective is introduced through a trip to various organizations in the national capital region. Through these activities, individuals in the 18A MOS receive more extended exposure to the role of interpersonal relations in their future work. This is a critical distinguishing factor in their SFQC experience, as SF officers will be expected to serve as ambassadors of their units, garnering support for their ODAs with foreign counterparts and U.S. partners alike.

The 18D course also includes an interpersonal component because medical practitioners must be prepared to employ with ease various communication styles and techniques while under duress, in order to accurately assess, diagnose, and treat a patient. Classes are provided on how to present a calming demeanor and ask questions that will elicit the best possible information for medical decision-making. These skills are rehearsed throughout training as medics treat fellow students or guerrillas during Robin Sage and in other SFQC exercises. Once in the field, 18Ds go beyond honing their interpersonal abilities through caring for their American teammates; they tend to also become involved in treating HN locals. This involvement opens 18Ds to greater cross-cultural exposure and experience, often contributing positively to their communication abilities on an interpersonal level.

The enhanced interpersonal and cross-cultural training received by 18As and 18Ds is important to the conduct of their individual job responsibilities, and this training pays additional dividends at the unit level. However, operational exigency often dictates that ODAs operating abroad must at times do without all twelve men, meaning that any operator may be called upon to represent the ODA in a sensitive interpersonal or cross-cultural engagement. SF, therefore, must train for the reality that all its members will need serviceable interpersonal skills.

**d. *SFQC Phase IV Review***

Phase IV, or Robin Sage, sends students into a fictitious country, Pineland, to conduct a U.S.-supported insurgency campaign. Aside from building and training a local guerrilla force, students interface with rural farmers and local citizens who serve as the supporting auxiliary and underground political network. In this context, both locals and guerrilla role players take on the cultural norms of Pineland. This becomes a test of the student's ability to culturally adjust, to correctly interpret nuances in facial expressions or body language, and to understand how failure to do so can have negative consequences. In this regard, Robin Sage is designed to represent a contained environment in which students learn to build rapport and influence others, so as to accomplish a larger mission. This training helps to deliver tangible lessons learned that can later be applied to real-world, high-stakes challenges on an operational deployment.

**e. *SFQC Phase V Review***

Phase V consists of language and cultural training aligned with the operational area of responsibility of the SF Group in which each student will serve. This phase offers four to six months of exposure to one or more of the potential cultures with which a student's unit might be partnered. Learning the language and interacting with native-born instructors introduces students to the perspective(s) of potential foreign partners. Language skills offer a high return on investment if practiced and used regularly, yet maintaining these skills can be difficult to integrate into the already-high operations tempo of SF professionals.

Nonetheless, language and cross-cultural skills may be poised to take on greater importance. Looming fiscal constraints throughout the U.S. military could precipitate a funding climate reminiscent of the 1990s, when special operators received minimal funding for lodging, interpreters, or equipment for partners. These conditions may increasingly require units to rely on their own language and cross-cultural interpersonal skills as vehicles for creating influence. While not altogether negative – for instance, a greater reliance on these skills positively reinforces the importance of gaining trust on a personal level, rather than through material means alone – these emerging budgetary circumstances and their likely operational consequences strongly underscore the urgent need to strengthen SOF interpersonal and cross-cultural capabilities.

### **3. Pre-Mission Training**

As mentioned earlier, SF units in their stateside deployment preparation tend to train the least on the skills that are most used downrange. Title X SOF training activities like JCETs, designed specifically to provide SOF elements with exposure to foreign environments, are valuable in helping operators maintain related skills and knowledge between active deployments.<sup>10</sup> However, JCETs and similar training exposures are insufficient to the initial task of developing the necessary level of individual cross-cultural interpersonal skills, and cannot stand in for such skill emphasis in pre-mission training (PMT).

Operators interviewed for this thesis repeatedly noted a very limited amount of exposure to training in cross-cultural interpersonal skills prior to deployments. The most commonly mentioned PMT venue for exercising such skills was the Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat (SFAUC) Course, which focuses on training operators in the unique skills required to conduct Direct Action in an urban environment. This training module holds clear relevance and value to SOF mission sets, but is a less than ideal as a venue for training

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<sup>10</sup> Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, “10 USC Section 2011, Special Operations Forces: Training with Friendly Forces,” accessed July 5, 2013, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/2011>.

operators on successful influence-based operations down range. Granted, SFAUC does provide some counterbalance to an otherwise heavily kinetic training focus. In this sense it does address the concern that, if operators' kinetic training is not interspersed with instruction on "soft power" techniques (for instance, negotiation or interpersonal communication styles and strategies), the training that *is* received (in this case, kinetic) can become self-reinforcing, to the detriment of other skill sets. For example, when units attempting to influence a local populace or partner focus more on kinetic activity, this tendency inherently reduces their focus on influencing local partners through less aggressive tactics. This tendency can reinforce popular support for the opposition and/or diminish the ability of the unit to establish long-term partnerships. Such circumstances can initiate a spiral of increasing kinetic activity and decreasing attempts to pursue more nuanced engagement styles. These operational consequences flow directly from training that emphasizes certain skillsets over others; for this reason, while the degree to which SFAUC does provide a venue for the exploration of interpersonal skills in influencing partners cannot be dismissed, there is ample room for its content to be reviewed and rebalanced.

To some extent, as well, PMT events like SFAUC are victims of their own success. SFAUC is dynamic and entertaining and, by design, offers instant, readily quantifiable feedback, whereas training on cross-cultural competence can seem less uniformly engaging to individuals within SOF culture and generally delivers more ambiguous results. These perceptions influence not only the opinions of participants, but also leadership decisions on PMT events..

#### **4. Specialty Schools and Civilian Training**

Special Forces and SOF, in general, have access to a full gamut of specialized schools. Many of these training venues offer some focus toward enhancing interpersonal skills and abilities. The Advanced Special Operations Training Course (ASOTC) is arguably the best venue for honing these skills. But it is important to note that operators are screened for this course, and assessed during it, to ensure they have the requisite level of interpersonal ability to

complete training. Lack of those skills is also one of the most common reasons for course failure.

At their own discretion, units sometimes send operators to a number of other valuable courses in negotiation, mediation, elicitation, sales, interrogation, persuasion, and the like. Attendance can be individual or can include entire companies, and sometimes focuses on detachment level leadership and above. Training may be held at the unit or offsite through civilian or academic institutions. Some examples include courses with the Harvard University Program on Negotiation, or interrogation and interview training by John Reid and Associates. Despite the utility of the training, only a limited number of personnel receive these opportunities. It is thus difficult to consider such venues an opportunities for unit-wide enhancement of skills.

Correspondingly, operators who need interpersonal training the most will often be the last to receive it. Consider how when a company or team has a seat or two at a prestigious course, typically abrasive operators are not the first to be chosen. Understandably, leaders hesitate to send less diplomatic personnel to represent their organization at external training venues. Consequently, a situational risk is incurred by limiting the interpersonal training of such individuals and then sending them out on missions to encounter the same array of partners as their highly trained, or naturally talented, fellow operators. This risk highlights a paradox of value in sending the worst operator to some of the best training.

For example, this author's outlook changed after completing a negotiation course held by the business school at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). With minimal exposure to theory and extensive practical exercise, the entire group, including individuals who, arguably, were not interpersonally inclined, saw a noticeable increase in their negotiation skill level. Theory set the conditions, but the increase in skill level was largely due to students gaining a new respect for obtaining the perspective of those they might need to influence, thanks to diverse role-playing exercises. That training, the research undertaken for this thesis, and this author's operational experience collectively indicate that placing emphasis on cross-cultural interpersonal skills is an effort worth undertaking.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter overviews the research method, offers reasoning for the approach, and provides consolidated data concerning subjects and the overarching process. The larger aim of this thesis is to present information related to SOF cross-cultural and interpersonal skills and to validate their utility through the experience of actual operators. As such, the author conducted interviews with SOF operators (Army Special Forces, Army Ranger, and Navy SEAL) to collect concrete, first-hand accounts illustrating successful and unsuccessful cross-cultural, intra-cultural, or organizational interpersonal engagements or negotiations. Table 1 offers a summarized review of the subject data.

SUMMARIZED SUBJECT DATA (ORGANIZATION, RANK, UNIT, AND EXPERIENCE)							
SOF Organization		Rank and Total by Organization			Recent Units of Service		
U.S. Army Special Forces		16 (14 x MAJ, 1 x SFC, 1 x CWO3)			USASFC(A) x 1, SOTD(A) x 1, SWTG(A) x 2, 1 <sup>st</sup> SFG(A) x 2, 5 <sup>th</sup> SFG(A) x 5, 7 <sup>th</sup> SFG(A) x 2, 10 <sup>th</sup> SFG(A) x 2		
U.S. Army Ranger		1 (1 x MAJ)			75 <sup>th</sup> RGR(A) x 1		
U.S. Navy SEAL		3 (3 x LCDR)			NSWG1 x 1, USSOCOM x 2		
Article I.							
Years of Service		Years in SOF		Deployments		Months Deployed	
Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total
13.05	261	7.9	158	5.9	117	35.7	713.5
Reference Appendix C for source data concerning individual experience.							

Table 1. Summarized Subject Data

The 20 operators listed above collectively provided more than 30 hours of interview material, which yielded over 500 pages of transcripts. Based on transcript analysis conducted by the author, these operators shared 96 interpersonal experiences from deployments to 23 different countries. These experiences included deployments for combat, foreign training missions, SOF

duties associated with embassy assignments, and other related work. Due the fact a high number of subjects had experience in Iraq; there is the possibility that research results were influenced by an “Iraq effect.” However, since this research was focused on the collective analysis of all the events experienced by subjects, regardless of location, analysis of a potential “Iraq effect” extends beyond the scope of this thesis. Table 2 below provides a list of each country and its associated number of engagements.

<b>COUNTRY DATA OVERVIEW</b>	
<b>Country of Engagement</b>	<b>Engagements</b>
Iraq	42
Afghanistan	13
Philippines	13
Malaysia	2
United States	3
Bosnia	2
Bangladesh	2
Middle East Undisclosed	2
Mali	2
Belize	2
Indonesia	1
Africa Undisclosed	1
Somalia	1
Nepal	1
Thailand	1
Colombia	1
Mexico	1
Guatemala	1
Korea	1
Papua New Guinea	1
Persian Gulf Undisclosed	1
United Arab Emirates	1
Azerbaijan	1
Total Engagements	96

Table 2. Country Data Overview

This data was collected and analyzed using a combination of the critical incident interview and grounded theory methodologies.<sup>11</sup> Using the critical incident interview method, the author asked each participant to share both successful and unsuccessful negotiation experiences where the participant either influenced or failed to influence another human. It's important to note up front that the category "successful" or "unsuccessful" was not imposed by the researcher; rather, the research attempted to discover the phenomenological experience of the interaction and sought to look across cases to glean themes that were common across experiences, to allow the participant to consider when they successfully (or not) influenced another. The participants disclosed 27 negative and 69 positive influence incidents experienced in the 23 countries listed above. These incidents served as a method for theoretical sampling and constant comparison to generate theory.<sup>12</sup> Upon completion of the critical incident interviews, the stories themselves became the focus of analysis and the author compared those experiences that interviewees deemed successful against unsuccessful engagements throughout the entire data set. It is important to note that the interviewees, not the researcher, determined whether experiences were labeled as successful or unsuccessful. This thesis is not an objective assessment of engagements. Rather, it is built on the phenomenological experiences of the operators themselves who in retrospect assessed their own experiences as successful or unsuccessful.

Following the canons of grounded theory outlined by Glazer and Strauss, the author coded the transcripts using constant comparison, inquiring into what the data suggested, and determining what theoretical categories emerged.<sup>13</sup> Such a close review of the data did not seek to validate a preconceived

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<sup>11</sup> Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development* (Thousand Oaks; Sage Publications, 1998), 99-127; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 273-284.

<sup>12</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 273-284.

<sup>13</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1967).

hypothesis, but to surface themes. The initial coding of each incident was done line by line. The process was facilitated through the use of NVivo, a computer program for qualitative research and coding.

The method began with the researcher reading each transcript and coding actions or events based on their content. The initial process rendered over 300 codes. Codes were tracked for presence (or absence) across all of the interviews, grouped into like families, and connected with an overarching theme presented in contextual form. Themes are labeled by their family name for quick reference. The research identified eight major themes from 20 subjects across the 96 engagements. Table 3 below indicates these major themes and the frequencies at which they appeared within the 23 source documents.

THEME OVERVIEW			
Theme	Family	Source Documents	Events Coded
1.	Genuine Behavior	23	321
2.	Gaining Perspective	23	299
3.	Mutual Assistance	15	43
4.	Culturally Aware Behavior	17	80
5.	Building Social Capital	21	115
6.	Hanging Out: Informal Learning	22	281
7.	Overcoming Bureaucratic Constraints	21	128
8.	Multi-Group Coordination	17	51

Table 3. Theme Overview

The themes identified above are presented in the next chapter, along with supporting analysis and direct quotes from the interviews. Themes are applied

within a collective process map that will aid in their implementation at the interpersonal level and help explain how the themes are intertwined, and at times mutually supportive. The intent of extracting trends is to identify and isolate tendencies often unnoticed in the larger context of these interpersonal engagements experienced by operators. Evidence correlating these themes exists in both successful and unsuccessful cases, often with a higher presence in the former, versus a lower presence or complete absence in the latter.

## **A. THE CODING PROCESS**

This section elaborates on how each trend was constructed from a series of similarly coded events, with trends then grouped into families and ultimately developed into contextual themes. The initial process involved coding approximately 500 pages of transcripts, which rendered over 300 separate codes. These codes and their corresponding passages were then reviewed and organized into related overarching groups.

Next, the codes were reviewed again within their specific groups and compared against other passages. This process then delivered a “family” label that characterized several passages and codes. Lastly, the information was consolidated into a contextual definition that illustrates the overall recurring theme identified within that individual family. The family name was specifically used as a quick point of reference for each theme and as the label level applied in the process map.

To facilitate a more nuanced understanding of this methodology, the theme of “gaining perspective” is outlined in Table 4. That family name was assigned because each of these codes contained some form of reference to perspective. Examples of perspective-taking included subjects offering their own perspective as analysis of a success or failure, taking a partner’s perspective after a failure, listening or asking questions to gain a partner’s perspective during an engagement, or citing the relevance of “the big picture” to their perspective of

a single event occurring within the context of a broader relationship or sustained interaction.

Coding Process Example (Theme 2)		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Gaining Perspective	Appealing to others' perspective(s) Area familiarization Asking questions Assessing the situation Closed-minded approach Concern over perception of action Conflicting allegiance(s) Conflicting interest(s) Frustration in understanding environment Introspective thought Knowing your strengths Lack of knowledge on country team structure Lacking perspective Listening Meeting expectations	Misleading information Misunderstanding perspective Ombudsman concept Open-minded approach Outside perspective Partner connectivity with populace Partner embarrassed Perspective justification Perspective of partners Perspective-taking Preconceived notions Self-appraisal Understanding larger context Understanding options Understanding partner's motivation Understanding environment Western viewpoint
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Taking a partner's perspective or broadening/challenging one's own—and related actions that aid in creating perspective, such as asking questions, listening, or developing dialogue—collectively serve as a major positive catalyst during interpersonal engagements, and as a learning tool to understand failed encounters. This was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents with over 30 subordinate codes, including perspective-taking, asking questions, listening, self-appraisal, and having an open-minded approach. Reference term is Gaining Perspective.		

Table 4. Coding Process Example (Theme 2)

The next chapter will present this themes and supporting quotes from participants.

## IV. UNDERSTANDING SOF INTERPERSONAL ENGAGEMENTS

This chapter focuses on the themes derived from the research outlined in Chapter III. Before discussing the themes identified during the research process, however, it is important to define the term “negotiation” as it applies within the context of this thesis.

For the purposes of the research presented and analyzed in this document, the term negotiation refers to discussions undertaken to reach an agreement.<sup>14</sup> Such discussions could include scheduling a doctor’s appointment, buying a car, choosing a restaurant for dinner with your spouse, procuring a team mission, handling a tribal dispute, changing international nuclear regulations, or any another such exchange taking place for the purpose of arriving at a mutually agreeable outcome. This definition includes any interpersonal engagements that involve influencing the decision-making of others, and is not limited to strictly high stakes scenarios.

### A. HUMAN BEHAVIORAL TRENDS

This section outlines human behavioral trends in the context of interpersonal engagements.

#### 1. Theme 1: Genuine Behavior

***Theme 1: Success in handling interpersonal engagements or influencing partners is heavily reliant on the presence of real or perceived genuine human concern and interest. This was identified by every operator in over 50 codes ranging from humility, compassion and appreciation to respect, genuine interest, giving, and helping. Reference term is Genuine Behavior.***

Humans innately seek some form of evidence that others have their best interest in mind; this applies even more readily when it is necessary to influence their decision-making, especially when personal risk is involved. Research for

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<sup>14</sup> Google, “Definition of Negotiation,” accessed November 18, 2013, <https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+negotiation&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>.

this thesis found clear indications that a genuine level of interest in a partner, such that he or she even sees you as a friend, is the most important factor in creating real trust and influence.

The following anecdotes illustrate how operators experienced return on investment for genuine behavior. The first example is offered by an operator whose duties in Iraq often required influencing locals to take personal risk in support of the mission. In one case, the unit needed facial recognition on a high level insurgent target, and the unit's experience had decidedly indicated that money was not the answer.

Let me just say you can pay someone lots and lots of money and at the end of the day what is going to end up happening is—they get out there and they realize that the money is not enough for what I [the operator] am risking right now. There needs to be another motivator.<sup>15</sup>

In his story, the operator recalls spending an unusually great amount of time with one local, often six or seven hours in a single meeting. This degree of shared time and experience created an authentic bond. Sincere human connectivity became the driving factor behind success in influencing the local to obtain facial recognition of a high level insurgent leader. He recalled:

...we had a really good relationship. He genuinely could see that there was a relationship, and that there was a friendship. The perception was there that we had a good relationship. He was the guy that [sic] we were able to send in with minimal money, to get the video footage. He got it. I mean he got lucky with the pat down but even he came back and was like, "You know I wouldn't do this except you and I are such good friends."<sup>16</sup>

Another incident depicts an occasion when an operator in Iraq was developing relations in a tribal area to facilitate sectarian cooperation within the nascent government. A friend of the primary local group was killed in Baghdad

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<sup>15</sup> Subject 17, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 20, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

and the unit's interpreters recommended the operator attend the funeral. The operator's initial reaction was to refuse.

I said, "There is no way in hell that I am stepping foot in a mosque. Period. End of story." Like, I can't go into a mosque.

Yet, after the interpreters reassured the operator his guest attendance would be safe, the operator agreed. The interpreters advised that the operator's presence would be well received by the local partners. The engagement resulted in the following:

So I went to the mosque. . . . It built that much friendship between us because it was completely unexpected. Like there had never been a non-Muslim . . . [who] took the time to actually care about this guy even though I hadn't personally met him.<sup>17</sup>

When operators were perceived as caring individuals the relationship sometimes developed into friendships. In the following example, an operator developed a close friendship with a HN colonel. The initial relationship began with periodic casual visits over cigarettes and tea. The colonel's niece was later hit by a stray insurgent round, resulting in injuries that required specialized surgical attention in order for her to survive. After the operator weighed all options for procuring such care, to include calling his U.S. congressman, the young girl was eventually treated successfully. The kind efforts of this operator then served as a catalyst and a benefit. The HN colonel practiced a unique local religion with just over a million followers. Coincidentally, his sister was married to the head cleric for this religious group. Shortly after his niece was saved, the colonel called and said the cleric would like to meet him and extend thanks for the kind act. The colonel and his extended family escorted the operator and his men to the meeting. Upon introduction, the cleric, who spoke excellent English, candidly raised some concerns he shared with the U.S. regarding a neighboring country. He then mentioned that more than once a year his religious order made a pilgrimage into the neighboring country, in costume, with approximately a half

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<sup>17</sup> Subject 6, sergeant first class, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, July 31, 2013).

million followers. The cleric then offered the use of his pilgrimage as a mechanism for entering this country. The operator summed up the event with the following comments.

The point is that just drinking chai with [the cleric] and just being personable...all ends up with, "...we have a clandestine infil platform that really anyone can use." ...built on that one case of having rapport and smoking cigarettes with a guy. The thing that [concerns] me about the whole thing was what I should have done, and what I wanted to do, but what I don't think I am allowed to do, is [send him] emails. I think that I made a friend, but on a professional level because I think that there is important work that could go through [him] later down the road.<sup>18</sup>

Developing trust can offer unpredictable success.. Understanding scenarios like the one above requires taking a walk in someone else's shoes and seeing what factors influence their decision-making.

## **2. Theme 2: Gaining Perspective**

***Theme 2: Taking a partner's perspective or broadening/challenging one's own – and related actions that aid in creating perspective, such as asking questions, listening, or developing dialogue – collectively serve as a major positive catalyst during interpersonal engagements. This was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents with over 30 subordinate codes, including perspective-taking, asking questions, listening, self-appraisal, and having an open-minded approach.***

Several successful negotiation stories involved the theme of taking the perspective of the other. For example, the following comments by a U.S. SOF operator reference an incident when his men caught a partner unit syphoning fuel from his men's boats. The U.S. SOF unit was training and operating with a partner SOF maritime unit in an effort to identify insurgent activity within an expansive network of small islands.

So [the incident became] a leadership issue . . . like, "Hey put yourself in their shoes. They are poor. They are going to try to find a way to make money." That doesn't make it right. We think like

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<sup>18</sup> Subject 16, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 19, 2013).

Americans. We go over there or whenever we deploy we have all our resources we need. I [told the unit], "It is not the same for them. They are scrapping to make ends meet."<sup>19</sup>

Despite this operator's ability to appreciate his partner's perspective the men in his unit were reluctant to continue training with the partner force following this incident. This points to the importance of prior training in interpersonal skills like perspective-taking, in order that they not appear too risky or unfamiliar for operators to consider implementing downrange.

The following anecdote likewise recounts an awkward scenario stemming from an operator's dearth of cultural knowledge and failure to gain perspective. Early in a deployment the operator determined that the partner force commander enjoyed bird hunting. Originating from an agrarian American state where bird hunting was popular, the operator thought bird hunting a promising foundation upon which to begin building a friendly relationship, so he accepted an invitation to go hunting. Prior to the hunt, the partner force colonel had jokingly mentioned, "If it flies, it dies." The operator and some of his men then joined the hunt. Each group separated to locate its own prey. The colonel had men flushing birds and was clearly doing very well. Being competitive, the operator felt compelled to bring in a few birds of his own. After shooting only one pigeon, the target prey, the operator noticed a small yellow bird perched in a tree nearby, and quickly shot it without being noticed. He thought this would be an entertaining addition to his otherwise meager catch. The group then gathered to end the hunt. The colonel proudly displayed 20 or so pigeons, and his subordinates displayed their respective hauls. The operator then presented his unusual kill and encountered this reaction:

The team sergeant drops a couple of birds and I drop one pigeon and then I am like, 'Oh, and the big victory!' and I flopped this guy down, and right then, like there are ten little Iraqi privates and other junior officers standing around the colonel, and this other major and they are just like . . . 'Oh yeah. About that . . .' I was like, 'What's the matter? You said if it flies it dies.' [The colonel] is like, '[Steve],

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<sup>19</sup> Subject 15, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 16, 2013).

‘this is the national songbird of Iraq. Volumes of poems have been written about this bird’s beautiful song. The prophet loves this bird.’ I mean I was like, Dude, I couldn’t [have embarrassed myself] any worse if I tried to. Know your culture.<sup>20</sup>

Fortunately, the operator was able to overcome his error through future positive efforts, but his experience reveals the complexity of cross-cultural perspective-taking.

In the next example of perspective-taking, and specifically listening, the SF officer in question was deployed to the Philippines for Counterinsurgency (COIN) and partnered with a general officer commanding the local Task Force.

I would say probably the largest “in” that I had with [the General] was that I listened to him. . . . [H]e told me, “[Bill], you are different than anybody else. You know? You don’t think you are smarter than me.” He said a lot of the American units that come in there, which are sadly ODAs, “ . . . try to advise me and tell me that they are smarter than me. . . . I have blown these captains off for years down here because they want to come in here and tell me how to do things. . . . I have been doing this for longer than these guys are old.” He is like, “Just listen.” And I did. I just listened to him. [Eventually] he got to the point where he asked me, “What do you think about this?” He was like, “We are going to do this. What do you think?” I would give my opinion and he would be like, “Alright. Sounds good.” Sometimes [my advice] had influence and sometimes it wouldn’t. Well, he started using me as a sounding board; I was advising, officially advising at that point.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, a failure to listen can have both short- and long-term negative impacts. The following incident occurred when an Infantry officer (later SF) dismissed advice from his Iraqi partners. He was told it would be a poor idea to conduct partnered missions into certain areas, and that doing so would create undue risk for his partners. The excerpt below explains the hard lesson learned.

They were right. In fact we pushed it one time, and I didn’t listen to them, and we had one of our [partner force] lieutenants get shot in the face, like point blank. The guy walked out of the house and shot

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<sup>20</sup> Subject 16, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 19, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Subject 4, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, July 30, 2013).

him right square in the face, blew his brains out. That is why we are, like, we need to listen to these people.<sup>22</sup>

This operator became open minded about listening after this event. Such pre-SOF learning experiences are common, and occurred in 19 of 96 of the stories—or 20 percent—referenced in this research.

Another approach to preventing such blunders as those described above is to ask questions. One operator employed this tactic to provide his team with a refined perspective on their role as partners. During the team's previous deployment, its missions had been very unilateral in terms of their planning and execution. Partners had been treated as a means for executing missions, not as a consulted party to mission purpose or design. To foster a higher level of partnership, this new team leader started asking questions. For example, he asked if all members of the partner force could drive. Most of them were from rural homes without cars. What would happen if the few trained drivers were injured? This process of asking questions and looking deeper into the root cause of issues took place in numerous instances and helped the operator's team rationalize the value of teaching partners to take the lead.

Yes, and it wasn't just [with our partners]—that was something that we really worked on in the detachment as well because the detachment was like, 'Why are we doing this? Last trip we didn't do any of this. This is stupid. Why don't we just go? We know where we are going.' We got to start peeling back the layers, and the detachment started seeing okay, there is something to doing some additional analysis. So it wasn't just the Iraqis [who] learned from it, my detachment learned from it significantly.<sup>23</sup>

A key aspect of learning from failure when it does happen is self-appraisal. As such, 15 out of the 20 operators interviewed engaged in some form of self-appraisal, reflecting on their performance. One illustrative example is the following anecdote offered by an operator concerning an initial encounter with a key partner force leader. Upon initial deployment into the country, the operator

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Subject 19, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 23, 2013).

attended a meeting with the local mayor, his staff, and the general commanding the police forces for the larger surrounding area. The operator had never met these individuals, was not known to the group as the new SF team leader, and wore civilian clothes. During the meeting the general lied about insurgents captured by his units and alleged lack of activity from the SF team.

As these untruthful comments continued, the operator became very angry. He had received information prior to the meeting that indicated this general had nefarious connections, and his lies validated the operator's initial bias. After the meeting, the operator hailed an interpreter and instructed him to approach the general, introduce him by name as the new SF team leader, and say that he did not appreciate the lies offered in the meeting, and would make it his personal mission in country to destroy the general's power and influence in the area. The general was stunned. The operator denied permission for a reply, reiterated his intentions and left.

Throughout the deployment, the general constantly undermined the success of that operator's team. The general's actions included imprisoning and abusing members of the team's partner police unit before execution of planned operations, or assigning them to duties not related to the unit's role. The operator later returned to the same area on a subsequent deployment to find that the general had been promoted and was now in direct higher command of the team's partner unit. The new conditions were such that the general was the primary senior partner for the team and the approving authority for its operations. The general continued to hamper the team's operations.

Concurrently, given the general's initial questionable reputation, the operator's team had been collecting information on his activities and reporting it through the operator's daily situation reports. This reporting resulted in higher U.S. command requesting a consolidated packet on the general's suspected nefarious collusions. The operator assumed this would result in the general's loss of authority. Instead, the general was moved to a new area populated by a rival sectarian group and used his position to justify increased sectarian violence. The

operator's actions during his initial meeting with the general resulted in total loss of rapport for two consecutive deployments and impacted not only his unit, but also other units and local civilians in more than one area of operations. The following comments by the operator reveal his self-reflection over that initial decision to confront the general:

Really it all comes down to the very first meeting. Had I just known in my heart of hearts that I wanted to rip this guy's throat out, but kept that to myself, played nice with him, sat down and had some tea with the [expletive] guy and been like, 'Hey, look. I know you said these things [lies about insurgents captured and the SF team's activity, etc.], but I don't think they are true. Where did you get your information? How can we change this situation? How can I make you comfortable with me?' If I had built rapport with that guy as much as I wanted to kill him, it would have, in the end, caused me less heartache for sure; it would have caused the FID force that was accessible to us, and I know then that just from the ability of my guys to train a FID force up and the ability of us as a team to use them, I think it would have been a phenomenal force at a time when it was super needed in [that area].<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Theme 3: Mutual Assistance

***Theme 3: Offering mutual assistance or shared involvement with partners, to include acting as a mediator between partners to enhance their mutual support, facilitates a higher level of collective understanding and positively impacts an individual's ability to influence others. This was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents and includes over 30 subordinate codes such as mutual learning, creating common ground, reciprocal value, and shared concerns. Reference term is Mutual Assistance.***

In the situation below, mutual assistance was a catalyst for success and also reiterates the value of sincerity in generating meaningful influence. An SF team was negotiating for use of a HN home in support of a clandestine operation. The best option was a home currently occupied by a local business owner and his extended family. Despite being offered a large sum of money, the owner hesitated. The owner's father had a garden on the property, and the father spent a good deal of time maintaining it. The father was not supportive of his son

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<sup>24</sup> Subject 16, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 19, 2013).

leasing the home because his cherished pastime would be impacted and the plants would likely die. The operator identified the problem and offered this solution.

Once we told him that we were not going to destroy—we had no intent on destroying the gardens—that satisfied him to some degree, but his emphasis was on how [were] they going to be maintained. So we allowed him to come in and do that on his own. So once we made him understand that we were willing to allow him access to that area, he was more open to us securing the property, and he basically told his son that he gave his blessing and his son was okay, even more excited about doing business with us because he was able to see my interaction with his father and that we were sort of accepting of his father's wishes.<sup>25</sup>

In this instance, money was not an adequate form of influence. Instead, the team showed concern for the owner's father and respect for his role as leader of the family. Garnering the father's approval resonated with the son, further solidifying the son's relationship with the SF team.

A key aspect of mutual assistance involves how actions are perceived. In the following example, an operator became the conduit between his unit and a local mayor regarding any activities they conducted in the surrounding community.

Yes, and you know, [I] just kind of felt like it was one of those things where as long as you treated that person like they were another human being, instead of a tool for you to be using to go out in town, then you could pretty much get away with whatever you needed... [In] the initial relationship when we came to meet, he came onto the base, and we just got to talking, so there was no agenda initially...no one had me going in to talk to this guy in order to develop this relationship so that we could go out in town. It was just we got to talking, I could tell that this was some guy of importance, so I just started making the friendship.<sup>26</sup>

At the time, recent bombings in the area had injured U.S. forces, restricted movement in the local community and caused related concerns with the mayor.

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<sup>25</sup> Subject 12, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 14, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Subject 17, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 20, 2013).

This serendipitous initial meeting turned into a friendship and later became useful for overcoming the issue of movement within the community.

In many cases, mutual assistance arises through identifying common ground. Identifying with people on some level can serve as an access point to influence. For instance, an artillery officer (now SF) describes how he found common ground in discussing religion with Afghan partners.

And, [when the Afghans said] “You know more about my faith than I do,” that seemed to make a difference. It was just like telling them basic stories about Moses coming out of Egypt and Abraham before that and this or that. They loved that stuff being able to trace it all the way down. Just that little bit of knowledge and saying it wasn’t something that I believed, because I don’t necessarily see it as all the same faith, but I was saying that at the time to say, “Hey we are all cut from one skin. We are all from one cloth here. We are all from the same faith base. I respect that, you guys respect what I have got going on.”<sup>27</sup>

Because the operator often held Bible studies and served as the de facto chaplain for the group, he ended up having the following encounter:

The senior [Afghan] in the camp ended up coming and talking to me about it and how, “There is greater respect for you, Mr. [Robert], because you are the religious head of this entire base.” That seemed to make a significant difference with how I was seen from the Afghans and what they saw as, “Oh, he has a lot more clout than we thought he had,” which was kind of a fascinating picture. He might not be in charge of the guns, but he is in charge of the God thing.

Subsequently, the SF team running the camp began to seek this individual’s assistance for certain issues involving the partner force.

Similarly, a situation in the Philippines demonstrates how common ground can reach beyond differences. A partner force general suggested to an operator that they host a local viewing of a boxing match with Manny Pacquiao. The primary idea was to invite enemies from the local insurgent group. Initially, the operator questioned the idea, but the general insisted it would work because

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<sup>27</sup> Subject 19, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 23, 2013).

Manny was a national hero. His fame transcended religious and culture barriers, forming a national rallying point. The combined planning effort resulted in the following success:

No kidding, like everybody from the insurgent camp walked through the jungle, like lines of people with guns and everything and they set down their guns at the front of this camp and watched the Manny [Pacquiao] fight with the locals from the village where the team lived. Like no kidding, 150 people. They [sat] and [watched] the fight like nobody cared about who was American and who was Filipino, who was bad and who was good. The camp—the bad camp and our camp, the good camp, like no kidding, setting down our differences for two and a half hours and coming together, like, no kidding, drinking beer and watching a Manny [Pacquiao] fight in a bamboo hut in the middle of [nowhere]. Like we were everybody's best friends.<sup>28</sup>

Such common ground offers an access point to influence groups that do not normally interact.

For example, in the following anecdote, an operator had assisted two separate locals, an Iraqi and a Kurd, in reenergizing their respective businesses. One local made concrete barriers, while the other contracted crane work for construction. Recently they had each attempted expansion into the other's business realm, and the resulting friction drove both men to begin undermining the other's success to the point the operator had to bring them in and mitigate potential violence.

Well, we kept it as just—I kept it light. Kind of kept it friendly. They immediately walked in the room and it was, “Captain, I am not talking to this man. He is a Kurd.” The Kurd is like, “I will shoot you right now and this conversation will be over with.” Instead of like, “Hey, guys, don’t talk that way,” [I responded with] more of a—laughey, jokey—“This is why I like you guys. You guys are funny. You are more like each other than you can possibly imagine.”<sup>29</sup>

The operator lowered tension with some humor, and then explained how each individual was controlling a different business that offered opportunities for

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<sup>28</sup> Subject 4, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, July 30, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Subject 11, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 13, 2013).

mutual support. This approach allowed them to see one another as complementary, rather than as historical enemies. After this, the two men agreed to divide and conquer, with one focusing on concrete and the other on crane work, so that each would send the other business in his area of expertise.

In this final example, a Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operator sought advice from an SF team nearby.

I just wanted to see how they did business and it was just such a better working relationship. I don't think they were living with their guys, but for some reason there just seemed to be some sort of glue there. I think it was because they included more of the mission planning with the Iraqi guys. There wasn't as much force feeding, whereas I would go down and lay down the map like, "This is what we are doing." I think there was a little bit more like dialogue on their part to kind of make the Iraqis feel more part of the game.<sup>30</sup>

The following anecdote captures the benefit of this kind of inclusion in fostering a partnership.

So we were living on the base camp with the [Iraqi] battalion, and as the battalion did things, if the battalion commander and his staff were a part of anything, then we were involved in that. Now the maintenance of the camp, so eating, defenses, engagement with the locals right around the camp, all of that we were fully a part of.<sup>31</sup>

By participating in these activities, the operator's team conveyed a willingness to develop the partnership beyond purely its own interests.

#### **4. Theme 4: Culturally Aware Behavior**

***Theme 4: Maintaining cultural knowledge and flexibility serves as an effective conduit to creating genuine interest and shared value, reinforcing successful relationships. This was identified by 19 operators and contains 20 subordinate codes such as cultural challenges, cultural difference, sectarian rivalry, and authority reinforcement. Reference term is Culturally Aware Behavior.***

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<sup>30</sup> Subject 17, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 20, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Subject 19, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 23, 2013).

Cultural knowledge and associated behavior, or its absence, can affect an operator's ability to influence a partner. However, interviews undertaken for this thesis reveal that cultural expertise is relatively less important *if* an operator can demonstrate a genuine interest and shared concern for locals. The following example from Iraq highlights the importance of shared concern:

They had no issues with [us not growing mustaches] just because they knew Americans don't like growing mustaches because it isn't the 1970s. They were fine with that. It wasn't the big insult that a lot of people think it is. Or not eating food because people think if you don't eat this, they will assume you think they are gross, or they will take it as an insult...but the more important thing is, it is not the cultural awareness, it is just proper respect. If you are going to go and do a mission with somebody, you should probably get to know them.<sup>32</sup>

In a larger sense, though, cultural awareness offers a conduit to the perspective of partners. Without it, actions can be misunderstood. In the case below, an Infantry officer (now SF) used a young English-speaking Iraqi enlisted soldier as an interpreter. In doing so, he had inadvertently created a situation in which a low-ranking soldier was passing instructions to senior leadership. When a new Iraqi commander took over, this difference in rank was not well received, and the new Iraqi commander quietly transferred the enlisted English-speaking soldier to other duty. The Infantry officer was frustrated after having spent nine months working closely with the old commander and this particular interpreter. Compounding this situation was the fact that the new commander had been inserted based on political connections. The new commander demonstrated little tactical aptitude and never went on operations, yet demanded the respect due his rank and position. Under the guise of discussing operations, the Infantry officer decided to explain his need for the young interpreter. He initially approached the matter with a polite tone. However, his underlying bias for the old commander, and his issues with the questionable performance and background

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<sup>32</sup> Subject 11, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 13, 2013).

of the new one, surfaced. Here is what took place shortly after their conversation began:

[He] starts yelling at me because I am a captain, and he is a lieutenant colonel. He could have been just appointed lieutenant colonel; I [had] no idea if this guy [had] even been in the military. So he starts yelling at me and giving me a hard time, at which point I totally lose my cool, if you can believe that, and I start yelling back at him. It gets to the point where I am yelling stuff at him, and I am not really sure what the interpreter is translating literally to him, to the point where this new battalion commander says, "I quit, I am done." He threw his hat on the floor and [yelled] something at me in Arabic and he is like, 'I am leaving.' ...So he goes outside and he is going out the gate to leave. Well, now part of my force is now in a mutiny, and they are leaving with him. I am like, well, this isn't good. So I probably have 50 guys [who] are throwing their uniforms down and going to go out the gate...

You know, it was like the situation wasn't as important as the face and the honor and whatever else was happening because he expected respect because of his position, instead of having earned it like the other officers. The problem was, that is a misinterpretation...because [as Americans] when we place honor on guys, it is because of action and personality and stuff like that, whereas with them, honor comes because of position. We had a difference of view, so it was—later on farther down the line I understood. At the time I didn't, but like I said, I was 24 years old.<sup>33</sup>

This situation resulted in a loss of rapport that resonated for the rest of the rotation, despite the commander returning after a week and attempting to have the U.S. officer fired..

On a positive note, the experience had considerable impact on the U.S. officer's approach, as he notes below:

But, as I got...older and more mature and had to go back a second time, I realized that there is more to the game [than] I realized the first time. Everything had to happen right now, and everything was important right now, my first time there; whereas, when I got back the second time in 2008, I realized...there is a lot more political

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<sup>33</sup> Subject 2, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, June 6, 2013).

maneuvering and a lot smoother way to get what I want without having to get into [these] blow up scenarios.<sup>34</sup>

Overall, respect and hierarchy within the Iraqi culture were important, but the large issue was the operator's individualist approach to a collectivist-oriented partner. Such adjustments are critical to strategic success in engaging and influencing partners; negative results on even a single tactical SOF mission, as a result of a lack of cultural knowledge, could mean expulsion from the country, as the following operator feared while in a politically sensitive country:

In this particular country...you are doing everything you can just to stay there. You are walking on eggshells. So I always had that in the back of my mind anytime I had a meeting with those guys because you just don't want to say the wrong thing. Obviously, if you [anger them], it is game over.<sup>35</sup>

A related concern mentioned in over half the interviews was sectarian rivalry or violence. SOF routinely either partner with rival groups within a given foreign defense structure, or deal with similar divisions in the local populace. This can present complex challenges in building trust or serving as a mediator. For example, the following situation occurred during a training mission in Mali, where a long time rivalry exists between black Malians and Tuareg Malians. A SOF team was training Tuaregs in a camp dominated by black Malians when tensions broke out.

Before arriving, the team had been told that U.S.-supplied equipment held on the base would be provided to the Tuaregs after they completed their training. This was conveyed to the Tuaregs as a form of motivation. However, the team quickly determined the Tuaregs didn't have enough basic gear to complete the planned training. Many didn't even have shoes or uniforms, much less the correct web gear to hold weapon magazines. This prompted a request to the embassy for an immediate draw of the gear to support training. It was approved, and the team coordinated for the issuing of the gear. However, the supply warehouse

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Subject 15, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 16, 2013).

was run by black Malians. They demanded the Tuaregs sign receipts for the gear and return it after the training. The black Malians began yelling at the Tuaregs, accusing them of intending to sell the gear on the black market, whereas the Tuaregs argued that as fellow service members, they should be issued the same equipment as the blacks. This argument erupted into a near disaster, and the operator's team had to step in to prevent an escalation:

We stopped everything, pulled everybody back, we tried to iron everything out, went over and talked to the base commander with the [Tuareg] unit commander, tried to figure out what the hell is going on. Basically [the situation] just evolved [into], 'Hey, this is a Tuareg unit, [training on a base with a] black Mali commander with all his nugs at the base, and here is your [Taureg] equipment, but you [the Taureg commander] are going to give it back to me [after training] ... You have got the Tuaregs basically like rising up starting to revolt, and this is a bullshit type thing where it almost comes to blows at the warehouse, like people fighting.'<sup>36</sup>

Ultimately, the operator brought the Tuareg unit commander and black base commander together in one room and asked them both to offer their perspective. After they each voiced their concerns, the commanders were able to reach an agreement so that the equipment was issued and training continued.

## 5. Theme 5: Building Social Capital

***Theme 5: Managing relationships that result in influence requires building upon how a partner is perceived by others in the organization or community as well as by himself or herself. This was identified by all 20 operators and contains 30 subordinate codes such as adaptability, boosting partner ego, humor, selling, and building others' social capital. Reference term is Building Social Capital.***

. One common tool for success is building others' social capital. One way an operator and his team accomplished this was to hold a "SWAT Olympics" for several local police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams with whom they worked in Iraq.

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<sup>36</sup> Subject 18, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 20, 2013).

When the winning SWAT [team] went home, they had a parade for them...and all these people...were all there, and they had this huge parade. So it built a lot of pride in that SWAT [unit]. So that was beneficial, I think. That was like an extra-curricular activity that had, like, very beneficial second and third order effects.<sup>37</sup>

While broad ramifications are possible through building social capital, the approach can be as successful on an individual level by giving credit to others. In the following case, an operator had worked slowly to influence his HN partner to implement a legitimate process for requesting warrants prior to operations. Initially the commander was reluctant to do so, but he had recently come around to the operator's point of view. Then shortly after his acquiescence, a national conference was held of all SWAT unit leaders. The operator advised the commander that not only should he showcase the warrant process, but that he would receive credit for it at the conference. This advice produced the following results:

When we got back to our area, I could do no wrong because he knows that him [sic] being important is both good for him and good for our mission. He saw that...I was willing not to take the credit and give it to him. In everyone else's eyes, he is this visionary that, like, has a way forward, and he is truly [inaudible] with respect to the law. In which case, he would be a lot more lenient to anything that I would suggest that we should go and do.<sup>38</sup>

The same American operator also emphasized the work required to help a HN partner.

But there is a lot of work behind doing something for people, whether that is your friends and you are helping—I had one [expletive] friend that was driving me nuts, he would ask me a hundred times to help him do his backyard, but he was a good friend and he deserved it, so I would go over there and bust my ass to help him out. Same thing with this [HN partner]. It was like it was hard work to be this guy's friend.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Subject 18, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 20, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Subject 2, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, June 6, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Influencing others calls for a degree of adaptability, which is often required when working in a country team environment.

But it still gave me exposure to [the fact that] not everyone thinks like a SOF guy or DoD guy. Everyone has their different upbringing, especially the State folks—[who are] totally risk adverse [sic], don't want to kill anyone.... It seems like a different day of the week you might be dealing with a different personality in the same guy. So it is just kind of being able to read what day it is and know when you can be tough and up front, or when you might need to compromise a little bit. I don't know what it is that makes you recognize those things, but I think it is just having the ability—I guess it is flexibility basically—in your own personality that makes it work.<sup>40</sup>

Emotional control also plays a part in building social capital and can require acting or role-playing, as the following anecdote illustrates.

Leaders in the operator's partner unit had a warrant issued for their arrest and their pay was stopped. This situation required that the operator and his partners visit a judge at the provincial headquarters. During the meeting, the discussion deteriorated quickly, resulting in a shouting match between the judge and the operator's partners. Thinking creatively, the operator joined in the argument, yelling in support of these men before turning to them and saying, "Hey guys, just step outside. This is ridiculous. I am losing my temper." Once the men left, the operator confided to the judge that he had only been acting to show support for his partners. He conveyed that he understood the judge's perspective, and asked if they could work out a solution. The tactic garnered the following results:

I kind of worked with the judge there to come up with whatever the resolution was. The judge was so excited just to be in on this trick that I had played on my guys that he listened to reason. You know what I mean? Then when the judge realized I was just playing this trick, he was like, that is awesome. I am in on this secret. Just by letting him feel [that] he was in power, he kind of listened to reason, and he let my guys go.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Subject 15, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 16, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Subject 7, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 8, 2013).

By validating the judge's status, the operator helped resolve the situation. He identified the issue driving both his partners and the judge. When the judge saw that his U.S. partners respected him, he was willing to listen and create a solution.

As the previous example indicates, humor is important and five operators mentioned its value in either deflating tension or creating common ground. One operator observed this application on the target after a raid.

Yes. I think so. I think in that particular incident, the local nationals [were] laughing as well, you know, and it was—I don't know exactly what question he was asking at the time, but it kind of like diffuses—he [the Soldier conducting TQ] was able to diffuse the situation. It has got to be kind of an emotional event to have a strike force landing on your house and terrorizing you for like three hours, trying to figure stuff out, but [the Soldier] kind of like understood that and used [humor] as an advantage or diffuse, [sic] instead of just making it worse.<sup>42</sup>

Such micro-techniques reinforce the five larger human behavior themes identified in this section as necessary for influence. In the next section, the focus turns to themes predicated upon situational dynamics.

## **B. SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS**

"Situational dynamics" refers to circumstances in specific settings and situations that may impact an individual's ability to leverage influence. For instance, U.S. SOF often debate how much time should be invested with partners, how that time should specifically be spent, if it should be all work and no play, whether first impressions matter, and the like. Therefore, the first commonly occurring theme is one that tests military culture to some degree, but remains a crucial factor when it comes to successful influence.

### **1. Theme 6: Hanging Out: Informal Learning**

***Theme 6: Learning about others through "hanging out" beyond work is a significant catalyst for successful cross-cultural interpersonal***

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<sup>42</sup> Subject 13, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 15, 2013).

***influence. This theme was identified by all 20 operators and contains 18 subordinate codes such as playing sports, sharing meals, drinking alcohol, and living with partners, among others. Reference term is Hanging Out.***

“Hanging out” refers to a form of informal learning or learning by serendipity and has been documented in the literature on situational learning and communities of practice.<sup>43</sup> One difficulty with “hanging out” is the perception it’s a recreational activity, as opposed to a productive work effort. In the military, work-related travel perceived to be more social than productive is often referred to as a “boondoggle.” Yet the interviews collected for this thesis suggest that few instances of successful partner influence occurred *without* some social factor, while social-interaction was conspicuously absent from almost every failure. It is difficult to understand someone’s perspective, build common ground, or be seen as having genuine interest without socializing with that individual. For example, the operator below comments on how socializing impacted his ODA’s ability to develop relationships in Iraq.

It is not just get in and get the information, finish the patrol, go back to the FOB [Forward Operating Base]. I think that [hanging out] was an extremely key component of being able to develop relationships with [our Iraqi partners], having an interpersonal discussion with them, just hanging out, even if there is nothing going on, even if they are not doing anything and we are not doing anything. Still going over there without a specific question to ask, without a specific thing you want them to do and continuing to maintain and build that relationship.<sup>44</sup>

A different operator in Iraq noted the value that perceived friendship holds over material support.

The only influencing that you had to do was [maintain] almost a buddy relationship with them. Like they knew that if we were friends, then we could still continue to do missions. How you maintained the friendship wasn’t giving them money or fuel or anything like that, it was just hanging out with them. Not—and I don’t mean that for going to the range and shooting and training—

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<sup>43</sup> Frank J. Barrett, *Yes to the Mess: Surprising Leadership Lessons from Jazz* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 93-118.

<sup>44</sup> Subject 14, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 15, 2013).

but spending time with them after that. We would go over there with them and just sit down and watch some of their TV shows, or we would throw in one of our movies... So it was more like bro time if you want to call it that, just bullshit.<sup>45</sup>

The SF operators interviewed for this thesis relied heavily on socializing to build trust and influence with their partners. Those who spoke of long-term partnerships in Iraq all noted a return on investment after socializing with partners, as did the operator below regarding partnerships in the Philippines:

There wasn't a language barrier, and I think that went a long way. We just seemed to get along so much easier than, say...with the Iraqis and Afghans. You know, I guess it is probably because at the end of the day, we are just willing to go back, have a warm beer and barbeque some fish heads and whatnot. You know, I think that is good. I mean that has always been the glue that has held a SOF unit together or a platoon together. So same sort of thing there.<sup>46</sup>

The above Philippine example reveals several trends found throughout the interviews. Operators were consistently drawn to English speaking partners and tended to hang out with them more, which equated to better relationships. Typically, non-English speaking partners experienced less social-interaction after work, which led to less valuable relationships. In turn, those who were often the more difficult partners to influence received less time and attention.

Language barriers aside, humans are generally less drawn to those who do not share their interests. However, the value of pursuing mutual interests notwithstanding, SOF typically chooses partners for a purpose, so SOF bears the weight of bridging the relational gap.

This same disparity, however, also occurs with U.S. partners and requires awareness in order to seize an opportunity. For example, one operator interviewed used the "hanging out" approach to garner support from an agency partner during an embassy rotation. Upon arrival, the operator's small detachment had little influence or ability to weigh-in on decisions. Thus, he had to

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<sup>45</sup> Subject 11, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 13, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Subject 15, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 16, 2013).

find an opportunity to gain indirect influence through other power brokers in the embassy. An agency official mentioned a favorite TV series that was not locally available. The operator mentioned his interest also in this show and offered to bring in some episodes for viewing over lunch. He then used their viewings as an opportunity to build a casual friendship. As the relationship developed, the operator was able to use these TV sessions to garner support for his mission.

I had a way in because most of our conversations were quick back and forth, but if I could get in his office and sit there for a half hour longer straight, then I could actually start to talk about different programs I wanted to do. You know, I became a trusted friend, and I had something that he wanted. So even if it was something so trivial as a TV show in the middle of the day, it worked out. But at the end, that is U.S. to U.S. relationship [sic], but that is how a lot of stuff is done.<sup>47</sup>

Based on interviews conducted for this thesis, an absence of socialization with U.S. partners was identified as a primary contributor to the higher rate of failure with U.S. partners.

Another common route to success is meal sharing and 15 of 20 operators mentioned it 40 times in their efforts to build or maintain a partnership.

That approach actually was taken well because—so [the HN partner] basically opened up and it was not just taking one event, it was taking every day I met him like at least five times. I met with him for lunch, breakfast, dinner...then, of course, when he would go out, I would go out with him too.

Sometimes this high level of persistence and complete side-by-side involvement with partners was required to yield the most positive returns. But, as the following excerpt indicates, even periodic barbeques or parties can help to establish and increase influence.

The celebration that we had at Ramadan was a single day, but it was an entire day of us hanging out with them, not doing anything except cooking, having meals, playing volleyball, but that one day I think reinforced what we were doing prior to that day. I think we

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<sup>47</sup> Subject 7, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 8, 2013).

could have done ten different operations, but it wouldn't have been as effective as that one party that we had.<sup>48</sup>

As noted in the above reference to volleyball, sports also provided a good opportunity for common ground and socialization. Nine operators of the 20 interviewed mentioned this sports approach. One operator recalled that on a combat deployment, the team's relationship with its partners was initially tenuous. However, when the operator's team noticed their partners engaged in a soccer game and offered to join in, the relationship between the units improved significantly. This created a deeper partnership:

...when you knew they didn't want to go out on that mission because you just came in 30 minutes before you got to leave, they would still pull something together because it wasn't so much that they were going out because it was the job, it was because they were going out because you were going out. So there is this kind of loyalty that had been developed. You are going out with friends somehow.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the positive gains derived through soccer, though, the operator's team became overly aggressive on the field on one occasion, fouling their partners and pushing the boundaries of trust:

From there the relationship was hurt because it was almost like we had—you know, you don't beat up on your friends—well, even though they are not technical [sic] your friends, but you know what I mean. So then you go and ask for their help to go out on a mission and they were very, very hesitant.<sup>50</sup>

After this dynamic was recognized, the operator and his unit made a concerted effort to deescalate behavior on the field to recreate their former friendly environment. This was successfully accomplished and the situation between the units improved.

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<sup>48</sup> Subject 5, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, July 31, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Subject 17, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 20, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

The topic of drinking alcohol with partners is sensitive. With few exceptions, the U.S. military frowns on consumption of alcohol while overseas on official orders. Furthermore, many of the countries SOF elements operate in are Muslim. Even so, research conducted for this thesis indicates that it has a place within SOF partnership missions. Ten operators mentioned that drinking alcohol with partners offered value. Partner units or unit leaders often drank; in fact, sometimes not taking a drink was the more awkward choice. Below an operator describes a senior American involved in a SOF Key Leader Engagement (KLE) in a Muslim country who refused to drink, despite a prior warning that such a refusal could be perceived as offensive.

He didn't drink, and I just remember meeting with the KLE people a few times after that and they kept saying stuff like, 'Hey, he didn't like what we were setting up for him?' It was like, 'No, he really did like it, I think he was just sick.' You know, you have got to make up some bullshit or whatever. So I don't know, you just got to know the culture for some of these meetings.<sup>51</sup>

Another operator shared an example about the amount of effort that developing partnerships takes. When partnered with an Iraqi Commando battalion, his team focused strongly on partnership at all command and staff levels. Team leaders partnered with unit leaders while the other men partnered with staff and company level leaders. But this went beyond purely work encounters. The Americans worked out in the same gym, ate the same meals, and spent significant amounts of down time with their partners. At first the Americans were frustrated at giving up personal time. Later they saw the fruits of their labor and grew to understand how this interaction served as a catalyst for influence.

My guys ended up doing that to the point where at the end they were, 'Hey sir, we are having a little dinner. Can you come to that too? The company commander would like you to come there as well. I would like you to be there.' 'Sure, no problem.' ...But they got it at the end. Everyone was like, yes, this is now living with [our] counterparts. This is how it is supposed to be. It isn't just we will

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

call you when a mission is ready, and then we will all go together. It is you develop the intel, we are here to help you, let's live together as best we can, let's all go fight together. That is the way to do it. Yes, we spent a ton of time together. A ton.<sup>52</sup>

Spending time with partners creates opportunities for men to get to know one another on a more sincere level, largely through exchanges that occur informally, and the spatial conditions that facilitate these interactions for SOF operators are much more personal than those associated with conventional forces..

## **2. Theme 7: Overcoming Bureaucratic Constraints**

***Theme 7: Overcoming bureaucratic constraints routinely encountered within U.S. systems and those of international partners will reduce barriers to effective influence. This theme was identified by all 20 operators and contains 20 subordinate codes such as transitioning units, lack of continuity, and pressure from "Higher." Reference term is Overcoming Bureaucratic Constraints.***

The operators interviewed for this thesis mentioned multiple occasions, especially in Iraq, in which they found it difficult to explain to their U.S. chain of command the expenditure of resources necessary to build relations with Iraqi partners. One reason cited for the difficulty was the need to quantify success by the number of missions undertaken and insurgents killed, and this need often constrained the operators' abilities to build legitimate partnerships. The following account of a discussion between a team leader and his company commander illustrates this dilemma.

I mean, I was literally on phone calls—I got phone calls from my Company Commander saying, "Why haven't you guys—you guys haven't done any hits in like three nights. What [expletive] is going on?" "...[S]ir, I just spent an entire day at the Iraqi National Police Headquarters talking to one of their commanders about the locals in the area and [current enemy activity]." I said, "Isn't that what we are here to do?" He is like, "No, we are here to kill people."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Subject 19, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 23, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Subject 4, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, July 30, 2013).

The operator attempted to justify time spent with partners as necessary to understanding the intelligence picture. He characterized the time spent as crucial to developing a trust that ensured partners performed to a certain level on missions. A further issue arose when the operator was forced by his chain of command to conduct missions, despite his concerns regarding their value. As this situation evolved, the partner force leader questioned the legitimacy of such missions, making it awkward for the operator to ask his counterpart for assistance in executing them.

Relying on HN partners and interaction with locals to build an intelligence picture, not to mention a level of trust on missions, is an underlying requirement for SF. It is important for SOF leaders to understand and value the time and effort it takes to build that level of influence. For instance:

I think it is just—so many of us get caught up in what we are doing and, you know, like I want to have the A+ product for my boss, rather than I will give him a B+ product, but I am going to spend some time to really know what the hell is going on here, so [that] internally I really understand this place, rather than presenting [him] with this superficial product that makes [him] think I might understand it. Just prioritizing and managing times, I think, because in the end...you gain—it can only go so far, right? You can't just eat goat meat to winning [sic] a war, but you have to—if you want to have an understanding of the people and the culture and what the hell is going on, like the truth on the ground, you have to take some of that time to go and do that.<sup>54</sup>

This outlines a regrettably common habit among junior officers who may resign themselves to presenting a less than fully accurate picture in order to meet command expectations.

In one case, an operator's team needed to work with the Department of State (DOS) to achieve the mission. However, it was a clandestine mission, and he was constrained by not being able to disclose the team's primary purpose, even to a senior U.S. leader. Instead, as instructed by his command, the operator provided a mission overview that was intended to be sufficiently plausible to

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<sup>54</sup> Subject 7, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 8, 2013).

garner the redirection of resources from other efforts. However, the plan presented was limited in scope and seemed to describe duties similar to those already performed by the DOS. Thus, DOS leadership questioned the operator's true reason for being there, which led to the following outcome:

Again, the line that I was supposed to give him was that we were doing what was our operational deception plan, [ but] he wasn't very supportive of our activities there. The conversation turned somewhat hostile in...that he understood that the military and interagency relationship was one of necessity in Iraq; he was accepting that we were going to be in the area, and he knew that he couldn't stop us from doing anything, but he just was not going to facilitate our activities through the course of his activities as well.<sup>55</sup>

The issue was resolved when the operator had individuals from his headquarters fly in and provide the DOS with a full classified brief on their mission.

However, bureaucratic constraints can also coalesce to create favorable or enhanced conditions for partnership building, even if unintentionally. In one such case, an operator's team conducted a JCET in Mexico and was required to live in a small closed compound with its partner unit due to political concerns.

...we were forced to live in barracks alongside the Mexicans; we were forced to not leave the compound. So what ended up being a directive against my team's ability to conduct operations or training in this case, ended up being a very good way to build and maintain rapport with these guys because we were with them 24/7.<sup>56</sup>

Most often, though, problems are created or accentuated when operators receive pressure from their headquarters that do not take into account realities on the ground.

### **3. Theme 8: Multi-Group Coordination**

***Theme 8: Employment as a SOF operator requires the ability to simultaneously manage relationships and influence with multiple***

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<sup>55</sup> Subject 12, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 14, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Subject 9, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 9, 2013).

**organizations and individuals. This theme was identified by 17 operators in one code. Reference term is Multi-Group Coordination.**

Operators acknowledged being engaged in, and responsible for, a wide range of tasks and relationships, including embassy duty, foreign military advisory training, unilateral and bilateral operations, advising of local governments and civilians, interagency coordination, and Department of Defense (DoD) internal coordination. In the example below, an NCO operator visited a partner nation Secretary of Defense when his team's gear was held up at customs in a smaller country.

I remember being in his office thinking to myself—and he talked about [General Schoomaker] he was like, “Oh yes, I am friends with [Schoomaker] do you know him?” ...but I remember thinking to myself...at the time our Secretary of Defense was Rumsfeld, and I [thought] myself, this is like being in Rumsfeld's office. Like, this seems odd. Like it was just a matter of—it was sitting in his office, drinking some tea, talking about what the team is doing in his country and basically [reminding] him of who we are.<sup>57</sup>

By comparison, in the example below, an operator identifies issues that arose from various U.S. organizations coordinating with the same HN headquarters, often including the same commanding general.

Now this is where you come into saturation of the environment where you have 100 Americans—I am exaggerating—but you have multiple Americans trying to talk to the same people in authority and people who can make decisions. So you have multiple Americans trying to influence them, and now you are trying to deconflict with what they are doing, with what you are trying to do, and then this guy doesn't want to sit down and meet with Americans all day, so sometimes you are there in the same room at the same time with different objectives.<sup>58</sup>

In yet another case, an operator found himself serving as a conduit among U.S. interagency, military, and government entities, entirely aside from his duties with his HN partner.

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<sup>57</sup> Subject 10, chief warrant officer three, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 9, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Subject 14, major, U.S. Army Special Forces (interview with author, August 15, 2013).

That same country was a heavy interagency environment, so a lot of dynamics between State [DOS], the Theater Special Operations Command [TSOC], CIA, and the Task Force—really, just understanding the different cultures—and I was in a pretty good position because it just seemed like the TSOC had a very vague mission that no one understood what they were there for. The Agency and State didn't really get along, so, like, I just always saw myself as kind of the intermediary between the rest of the folks [and] the Agency. I was just kind of like a broker.<sup>59</sup>

As these brief examples suggest, operators can assume they will need to work with a wide range of partners.

To illustrate better the environment in which operators are expected to perform successfully, the next section will offer a series of negotiation diagrams. The negotiation process is often complex, even in a one-on-one event.

For example, in a one-on-one negotiation, both parties at a minimum have to consider impacts on multiple levels and, in many cases, actual negotiations take place at each respective level. It is vital to understand all of the levels within your partner's immediate organization, how and why they impact his decision-making, or even how these levels can be used to mislead someone. For example, a partner might claim his decision-making is constrained by another element, such as his headquarters, when really he is only using a falsehood to achieve his goal. To facilitate an understanding of these dynamics, Figure 2 below offers a visual representation of a one-on-one negotiation.

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<sup>59</sup> Subject 15, lieutenant commander, U.S. Navy SEALs (interview with author, August 16, 2013).

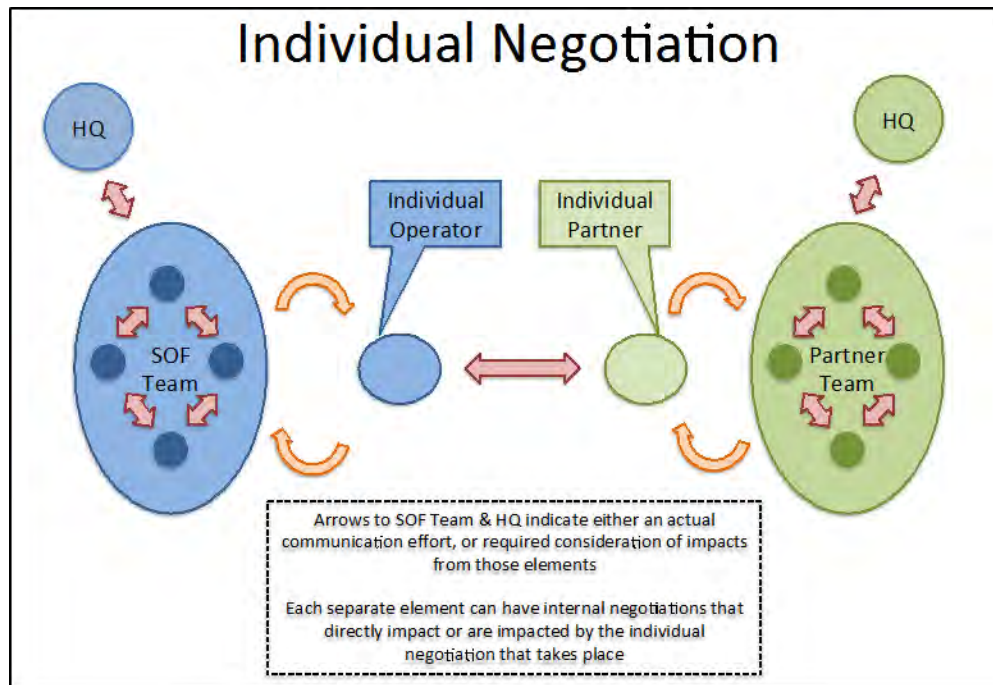


Figure 2. One-on-One Negotiation Chart.<sup>60</sup>

In the next figure we see a group negotiation, perhaps between different HN partners, local tribes, or elements in an embassy. In this case the dynamics of one-on-one negotiation are still applied within the larger context, as indicated below in Figure 3.

<sup>60</sup> Author-developed adaptation of a chart presented in the following article and lecture: James P. Ware, "Bargaining Strategies: Collaborative versus Competitive Approaches" (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1980), 6; Susan Hovevar, "MN3118: Negotiation for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction" (lecture at Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, April 2013).

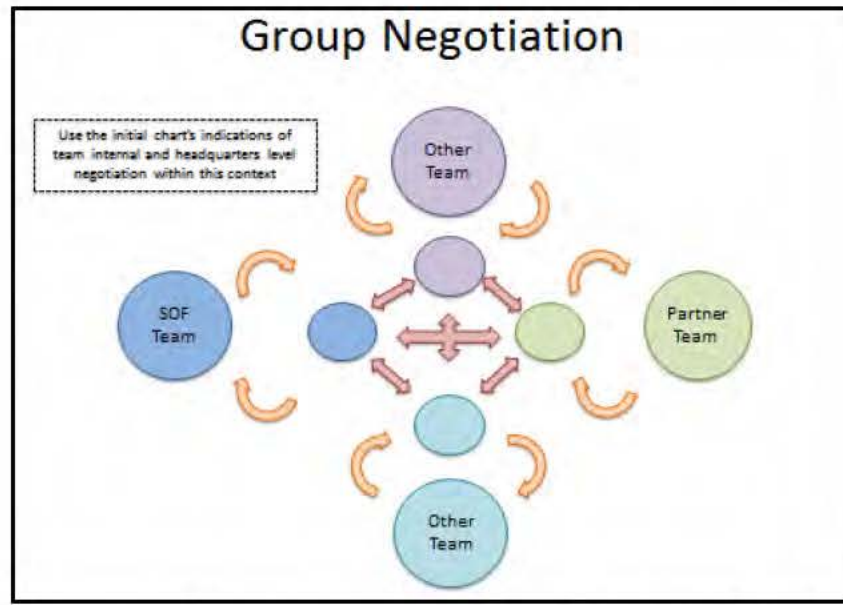


Figure 3. Group Negotiation Chart.<sup>61</sup>

Figure 4 below represents multiple simultaneous negotiations taking place during a SOF mission.

<sup>61</sup> Author's enlarged version of Figure 3 depicting individual negotiation dynamics.

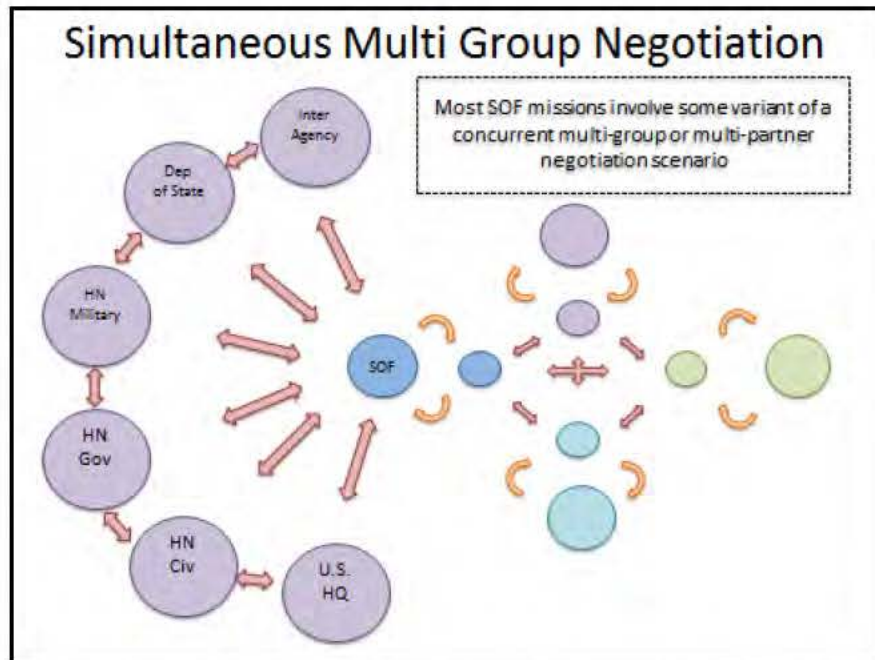


Figure 4. Multiple Simultaneous Negotiations<sup>62</sup>

Operating in the realm of negotiation and mediation with mixed organizations and cultures offers ample room for failure. A primary means of achieving success with all partners foreign and American is through interpersonal relationships. Personal relationships are necessary to ensure that individual and unit level competencies are recognized and fully employed. Maximizing an operator's ability to execute at the cross-cultural interpersonal level will provide that opportunity.

The following section will present a process map. The process map collects the themes discussed above and captures the ways they mutually support one another. The map depicts how, collectively, the themes can assist SOF Operators in gaining influence.

### C. THE INTERPERSONAL OPERATOR

The aim of this thesis has been to deconstruct cross-cultural interpersonal engagements to highlight tendencies that impact both success and failure. The

<sup>62</sup> Author's enlarged version of Figure 4 depicting group negotiation dynamics.

themes are distinct, but operate together to support success. For example, when training a partner unit in India, one might make use of the themes in the following manner: agree to have tea with a partner after training, which constitutes a form of hanging out; discuss family, to show genuine behavior; ask about unit concerns, to gain perspective; offer to assist with a future unit plan in return for jungle training, as mutual assistance; introduce partner leaders to a senior U.S. diplomat, to build their social capital; and mention any problems requiring discussion with subtlety, in keeping with collectivist cultural behavior.

Figure 6 illustrates how effective influence can be executed at the cross-cultural or organizational interpersonal levels while applying positive themes. A list of the positive themes applied here is provided below the figure for ease of reference.

# 1. Cross-Cultural Interpersonal Influence Process

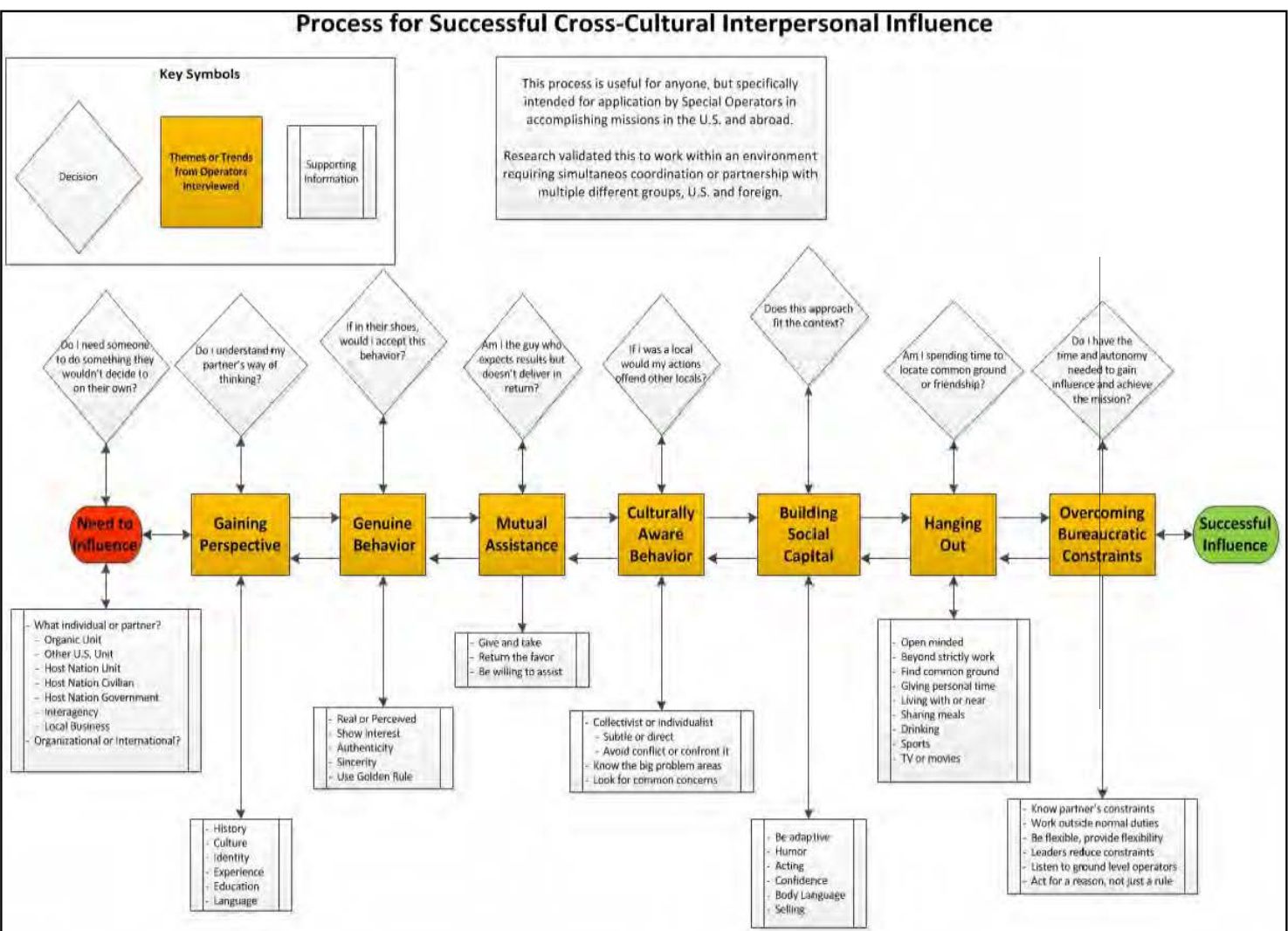


Figure 5. Cross-Cultural Interpersonal Influence Process Map

## **2. Review of Successful Themes Applied to Process**

### **a. *Genuine Behavior***

Success in handling interpersonal engagements or influencing partners is heavily reliant on the presence of real or perceived genuine human concern and interest. This was identified by every operator in over 50 codes ranging from humility, compassion and appreciation to respect, genuine interest, giving, helping, and the like.

### **b. *Gaining Perspective***

Taking a partner's perspective, or broadening/challenging one's own perspective—along with related actions that aid in creating perspective, such as asking questions, listening, or developing dialogue—collectively serve as a major positive catalyst during interpersonal engagements and also aid as a learning tool to understand failed encounters. This theme was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents with over 30 subordinate codes, including perspective-taking, asking questions, listening, self-appraisal, and having an open-minded approach.

### **c. *Mutual Assistance***

Offering mutual assistance or shared involvement with partners, to include acting as a mediator between partners to enhance their mutual support, facilitates a higher level of collective understanding and positively affects an individual's ability to influence others. This was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents with over 30 subordinate codes such as mutual learning, creating common ground, reciprocal value, and shared concerns.

### **d. *Culturally Aware Behavior***

Maintaining cultural knowledge and flexibility serves as an effective means to create genuine interest and shared value, reinforcing successful relationships.

This was identified by 19 operators and contains 20 subordinate codes such as cultural challenges, cultural difference, sectarian rivalry, and authority reinforcement.

**e. *Building Social Capital***

Managing relationships that result in influence requires using a range of effective approaches to create perceived mutual interest and find common ground. This was identified by all 20 operators and contains 30 subordinate codes such as adaptability, confidence, humor, selling, and building others' social capital.

**f. *Hanging Out***

Learning about others through “hanging out” beyond work is a significant catalyst for successful cross-cultural interpersonal influence. This theme was identified by all 20 operators and contains 18 subordinate codes such as playing sports, sharing meals, drinking alcohol, and living with partners, among others.

**g. *Overcoming Bureaucratic Constraints***

Overcoming bureaucratic constraints routinely encountered within our own systems and those of our partners will reduce a significant barrier to effective influence. This theme was identified by all 20 operators and contains 20 subordinate codes such as transitioning units, lack of continuity, and pressure from higher authorities.

**h. *Multi-Group Coordination***

Employment as a SOF operator requires the ability to simultaneously manage relationships and exercise influence with multiple organizations and individuals. This theme was identified by 17 operators in one code.

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## **V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

These tangible examples and related overarching trends have been presented to emphasize why SF and SOF need to focus on improving cross-cultural interpersonal skills. With the changing face of conflict and the formidable goal of building a global SOF partnership, operators will continue to work in complex environments where these skills are required for success. These environments demand operators who can navigate myriad foreign and organizational cultures to influence U.S. and foreign partners.

The need to improve both cross-cultural interpersonal skills and intra-cultural skills, a less complex variant, was presented in this thesis through the real-world experiences offered by 20 currently serving operators. During a total of 96 interpersonal engagements, these men acknowledged failing 28 percent of the time. U.S. partnered engagements failed at a rate of 37 percent and foreign engagements at a rate of 25 percent. These outcomes were largely driven by the following eight themes: genuine behavior, gaining perspective, mutual assistance, culturally aware behavior, building social capital, hanging out, overcoming bureaucratic constraints, and multi-group coordination. But the identification of these themes is the simple part: there are no shortcuts to acquiring these skills, no magic way to change the interpersonally challenged individual on a team from a “bull” to a “canary” in the china shop. Nonetheless, certain organizational and individual adjustments can assist operators who aspire to positive change in these areas.

In that spirit, this chapter offers some initial suggestions to improve cross-cultural interpersonal skills. Some apply directly to U.S. Army Special Forces, but most apply to SOF at large. Suggestions are offered in specific sections that focus on schoolhouse-supported training, initial SF training, unit-internal activities, and unit funded training.

Training in cross-cultural interpersonal skills applies most directly to the development of a global SOF partnership, operations in the human domain, and the conduct of most SF missions, including UW. Likewise, most of an SF team's time is spent with HN elements. The further that a partner's cultural norms diverge from those of the U.S., the more time it takes to gain perspective, build common ground, engage in genuine behavior, and attain influence..

A smaller cultural gap with inter-organizational American partners makes it feasible to garner greater returns with less exposure time. The problem is that units rarely engage in interagency partnership building and maintenance outside of actual deployments. When operators do not interact with U.S. partners until deployed, and then only intermittently to meet specific needs, mission success may be impacted for all U.S. parties involved. In other words, SOF needs increased—and normalized (i.e., routinely conducted outside of active engagement in conflict)—intra-cultural exposure with other U.S. organizations as well. This assertion is supported by the higher rates of failure, as revealed by this research, between U.S. partners than between SOF and foreign partners. In addition, increased interaction between SOF and other USG agencies will reinforce the success of all interagency bodies in their respective foreign partnerships.

The recommendations to follow will be broad in scope and not strictly cross-cultural. The intent is to improve operators' abilities to function interpersonally across the full spectrum of partner cultures, foreign and organizational.

#### **A. SOF OR SF CROSS-CULTURAL INTERPERSONAL SKILLS COURSE**

The widely recognized need for cross-cultural interpersonal skills in SOF aids in justifying the creation of a focused training venue and conduit for related expertise. Both SOF and SF currently have specialty courses that teach everything from Intelligence to advanced urban tactics; many of these selective training opportunities require either a recommendation or the fulfillment of certain

prerequisites in order for an individual to attend, and while all the targeted skill sets they address are important, no single area of competency touches as many aspects of a special operator's job as cross-cultural interpersonal skills. Influencing others is the primary avenue to success in SOF and especially SF. Because cross-cultural interpersonal skills directly enable SOF to engage in its signature "indirect approach," including the application of other specialty skills, a SOF-supported training venue on cross-cultural interpersonal skills would enhance mission success both by directly addressing a critical training deficiency and by reinforcing the value obtained from other specialty schools.

The process of developing a thorough cross-cultural and interpersonal skills course for SOF could begin with a USASOC level course run by the 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne). It could be established and conducted by a small core of one or two officers and no more than 10 NCOs. Instructors would be selected on a voluntary basis from SOF units and would also include civilian experts, interagency partners, or academics. Likewise, the student population could be broadly representative of SOF's real-world partners: training would be open to any qualified SOF MOS within the community, as well as foreign SOF students, interagency partners, and NGOs. A diverse participation base would add value to the learning experience and create professional networking opportunities.

Assigned personnel would then be sent to reputable civilian-military training venues to learn alongside and interface with leading professionals in the field of influence. This could include visits to various units and U.S. country teams to further study where problems occur most frequently, with whom and why. The initial intent would be to build a shared baseline of knowledge and develop a supportive professional network. The core participants, acting as ambassadors, would then export their experiences and contacts to similar programs and relevant individuals within their own networks. A panel of experts emerging from this collaboration would then be tasked with creating a five to 10-day program of instruction. This curriculum would include instruction in

negotiation, mediation, rapport building, and other cross-cultural or organizational interpersonal skills, with emphasis on planning and conducting practical exercises gleaned from real-world SOF missions. Cases presented could resemble those offered in this thesis, updated through communication with units, partners, or embassies. Lessons learned in individual vignettes would be discussed, reinforced with theory, and implemented in subsequent practical exercises, including a culminating field training exercise at the course's conclusion.

At a minimum, this type of intensive, scenario-based training would offer exposure to complex issues concerning various HN partners and country team members. NGOs, foreign businesses, conventional units, or government agencies could also be included. Attendees would rotate through a series of assigned roles in which they would practice negotiation or mediation. The course could also feature guest instructors from similar programs around the country. Guest students could be invited directly from organizations outlined in scenarios. To maximize the training value of course expenditures, the team of instructors could offer similar training events at the unit level, or could operate as a mobile training team (MTT). Further course enhancements would include a certification process for instructors at the unit level. Ideally, this element would also partner with SFAS and the SFQC in development and implementation of testing and training options in this realm.

## **B. SFQC TRAINING**

Chapter II illustrated what the SFQC already does to select and train cross-cultural interpersonal skills. Recommendations in this section are intended to supplement those efforts. It is important to establish conditions early in the course that reinforce the importance of—and maximize the opportunity for—acquiring cross-cultural interpersonal skills during Phase I. Potential SF operators need to understand up front how this skill set translates to their future work. Providing contextual examples of positive and negative applications from

previous and current missions would expose SFQC candidates to the wide range of individuals with whom operators work, along with the various challenges associated with adapting to those different interpersonal dynamics. Such a class might include asking candidates about their personal experience with other units or HN forces, as well as their experiences dealing with U.S. or HN civilians. Discussion would focus on why things happened and how they could have occurred differently. This would allow for group learning through shared personal experience, and would further the concept of fostering dialogue with partners in place of purely transmitting information. Likewise, instructors could share their own stories about how certain skills translated to success or failure and how their lessons learned have shifted their expectations of what traits are essential in a competent teammate.

After justifying and personalizing the importance of the skill set, presentations could be offered on mediation and negotiation theory. These could include an organizational and cultural review of a U.S. country team, since this is a common partnership. Instruction would review both the common usage of cross-cultural interpersonal skills in daily tasks, as well as potential complications, such as backside negotiations, that influence a partner's actions. Other training would introduce a range of possible partner perspectives and identities and would explore how those could influence decision-making. This would include a review of negotiation preparation and one or more role-playing scenarios, placing candidates in a partner's historical and cultural "shoes" to more fully appreciate differences in approach, as well as what is required from the U.S. side to impact a partner's problem solving process. Candidates could then be given negotiation scenarios to prepare and execute on another day or time, perhaps more than once. Additional scenarios could be inserted into the SFQC at other points in training; for example, in the 18C course, students might negotiate for the purchase of goods or transportation. In the 18D course they might have to handle a patient's family member after an error in some medical procedure. At language school, they might mediate a land dispute between

families in opposing tribes. These additional, MOS-specific applications would aid in steadily building SFQC candidates' knowledge base and broadening their perspectives regarding other organizations and cultures through role-playing.

As an additional or separate option, students could be asked to perform tasks on their own time during training away from Camp Mackall. For example, they could negotiate the purchase of a specific car or attend foreign social functions during language school. In short, before exiting the SFQC, new operators need to understand why these efforts are worth their time. Cross-cultural interpersonal skills will not be developed beyond an individual's natural ability if they are not justified, taught, and practiced to a degree that provides sustained value at the unit level.

## **C. UNIT INTERNAL TRAINING**

### **1. Language Training Options**

Language is an important discriminator between SF and other SOF units. Beyond facilitating communication, language skills enhance interpersonal relations. By learning a language, the operator naturally develops a greater appreciation for the culture. Learning and speaking another language also provide a ready platform for discovering common ground and for conveying interest in gaining and understanding, a partner's perspective.

Applied in this context, language skills reinforce SOF's ultimate success in developing global partnerships. One option for building cross-cultural interpersonal skills while simultaneously developing language and cultural knowledge and building contacts for the global SOF network is through live environment training (LET). SOF could also increase tie-ins with the global SOF network by arranging homestays with personnel from partner units. Current LET guidance from the commanding general (CG) of U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC) already calls for LETs to leverage homestay

opportunities.<sup>63</sup> Offering this as an option rather than a mandate would enhance the utility of the current policy.

Although any form of language training contributes to cross-cultural interpersonal skills and improves the ability of an operator to influence others, it is also important to note—as the research for this thesis reveals—that personnel can and have achieved successful influence with foreign partners without the aid of language skills. In such cases, influence was instead attained through implementing the positive behaviors presented in this thesis. Consequently, it will not be effective to rely on language training as the sole measure of ensuring that SF personnel have the requisite level of cross-cultural interpersonal skills. Similar findings were also reported in the 2007 Army Research Institute (ARI) study entitled “Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders.”<sup>64</sup> The ARI research indicated that general cross-cultural competence was as important, or possibly more important, than language skills and regional knowledge.<sup>65</sup> In short, language offers high utility, but needs to be employed in conjunction with the other skills identified in this thesis for effective influence to be achieved.

## **2. Interface with Local Troubled Groups**

In the context of SOF missions, operators are often required to serve as mediators between various sectarian groups that have long-standing issues with one another. Within the U.S., there are numerous opportunities for training in similar scenarios that could also benefit the civilian community. For instance, operators could meet members from rival gangs to learn what motivates individual or group action, or exacerbates tension. In some cases, this might seem difficult, but would not be more dangerous than many missions units regularly undertake. As an example, the Defense Analysis program at NPS has

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<sup>63</sup> Christopher K. Haas, *USASFC(A) Command Language Program, Live Environmental Training Policy* (Ft. Bragg: United States Army Special Forces Command [Airborne], 2013), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Allison Abbe, Lisa Gulick, and Jeffrey Herman, *Cross Cultural Competence in Army Leaders: A Conceptual and Empirical Foundation* (Arlington: United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 2007), 34.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

worked with local law enforcement in Salinas, California, suggesting COIN practices that the Salinas Police Department might implement to reduce gang issues. Another option could be working with an American Indian Tribe to reduce community conflict, improve civil services, or provide some other benefit. The key in designing any such program would be to explore options for interacting with different cultures or subcultures present in the U.S. These experiences would provide near-term, inexpensive opportunities to experience difficult and unpredictable interpersonal situations, negotiate or mediate with marginalized or disenfranchised groups, and employ the positive skills offered in this thesis.

### **3. Land Owners, Businesses, and Government Agencies**

Similar to SFQC instructors working with locals to plan and execute Robin Sage, operators could develop relationships with various land or business owners in the interest of supporting future training. This might include asking teams to form relationships with local offices of government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), or the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). SOF commonly coordinate with the FBI for law enforcement and justice concerns overseas, work with the DEA on CN-related missions, or plan commercial travel with weapons through the TSA. Such opportunities could allow operators to navigate new organizational cultures. The time invested and relationships built would develop long-term partnerships and understanding of how and why others do business. The expanded network and common ground established would reduce unknowns and enhance partnership on later deployments. Experience gained would offer valuable lessons without compromising mission success on a deployment. Lastly, such exposure could serve as an incentive for operators who have an interest in transitioning to these organizations after they retire or leave the service.

#### **4. Business Internships**

Business exposure through internships also presents an opportunity to develop the cross-cultural interpersonal skills identified in this thesis. This presents a unique chance for SOF personnel to operate in a new realm and broaden their skills, knowledge, and contacts. Likewise, companies can learn from exposure to SOF methods of planning. Internships could be arranged on a longer-term basis, such as for one- or two-year primary change of station (PCS) moves, enabling SOF to work with select industry partners. Alternatively, units could coordinate with key businesses in their respective areas for internships of a shorter duration.

One SF group is, in fact, already actively pursuing this type of personal and professional development for its operators. Subordinate battalions each select key businesses near their location for potential interface. The units then develop relationships and design short-term internships for select personnel. Typically, both parties benefit from this exchange of organizational cultures and expertise. Failure does not impact the mission or political conditions as it might overseas; however, any skills, knowledge, or “network reach-back” that are acquired do generate long-term utility for operators and their units.

Aside from enhancing the interpersonal skills addressed in this thesis, these venues would could create post-military career opportunities and grow SOF’s reputation in key sectors of business. SOF units – which deal frequently with businesses for such purposes as contracting equipment or training in the U.S. or overseas, or managing economic development supporting COIN – can likewise benefit from increased encounters with private sector partners, which enhance the participating unit’s understanding of corporate decision-making, finance, logistics, and other key organizational functions, all while developing a critical capability in the human domain.

## **5. U.S.-Based Foreign Interface**

Most large cities throughout the U.S. have neighborhoods or even commercial areas populated by people from various foreign cultures. In some cases these might even include refugees. Finding time to meet these people, either through local assistance groups or just by visiting the area, could offer positive returns. These could include purely informal visits by operators when off duty. At the very least, such venues offer an avenue for practicing language and learning about the history, culture, and perspectives of different groups with whom operators might later work. Practice in this context would also be far less threatening, politically or personally, than a similar experience in a sensitive deployed environment.

## **6. Conventional Unit Interface**

It comes as little surprise that research for this thesis revealed a higher failure rate between SOF and U.S. partners than between SOF and foreign partners. Many of these failed exchanges were between SOF and conventional units working in the same area. Intentionally approaching potentially contentious U.S. partners before—or outside the context of—deployments offers inter-organizational interpersonal lessons and provides a better learning platform without the risk of mission failure. Such relationship building also presents potential for an array of tangible long-term benefits.

Many SOF personnel have difficulty operating with conventional partners. Rightly or wrongly, there is a pervasive belief among special operators that conventional units think of them as “cowboys” and have trouble understanding SOF’s way of doing business. Initiating some form of ongoing partnership with conventional units might aid in closing that cultural gap on both sides. This does not necessarily require mandated, unit-wide training events with other U.S. units, but could include relationship-building practices as simple as dropping in on neighboring units to make introductions and discuss any appropriate questions either unit may have about the other’s activities. These efforts can create space

for an ongoing dialogue about how and why SOF conducts business differently than conventional units, and how a SOF unit's activities can integrate with a neighboring unit's own work.

## **7. Voluntary Foreign Aid Missions**

In the corporate world, some organizations allow a temporary leave of absence for one to two months so that employees can do volunteer work abroad. Certain political conditions and related constraints may not allow for this in SF. However, the concept is worth reviewing and considering as a form of permissive temporary duty for personnel so inclined. Ideally, such individuals could go to a country in their unit's area of assignment and use their target language. As another benefit, interested operators could attend these events with family members. The USSOCOM Preservation of the Force Task Force is focused on relieving stress placed on marriages and families after years of combat deployments. Supporting such opportunities would serve this purpose and simultaneously develop cross-cultural interpersonal skills, language capability, and cultural knowledge at the operator level.

## **8. New Context for Formal Unit Functions**

Like many military units, SF often holds Christmas balls or other annual formal unit functions. Units should consider holding these events in business or embassy attire and not just always in uniform. Operators are often asked to perform missions that require interfacing with embassies or related civilian government offices. Existing SF formals or other unit celebrations can be usefully leveraged to accustom operators to the most basic elements of civilian engagement, beginning with attire and ceremonial formalities within American culture, before a mission requires familiarity with such conventions. Units might even consider funding a single suit for operators not already owning proper civilian business attire, or coordinating with local men's clothiers to host occasional "dress for success" events to help inform operators on this subject.

For better or worse, appearance can help establish initial common ground. Dressing in appropriate civilian attire under certain circumstances is no different than growing a beard or wearing traditional dress in Afghanistan. If operators fail this first test of cultural appropriateness, that failure can preclude them from advancing a relationship to the level at which they are able to employ other cross-cultural interpersonal skills.

#### **D. UNIT-FUNDED TRAINING**

The current era portends reduced funding for unique civilian specialty schools. SOF should still seek to extract useful skills and techniques from experienced organizations outside its realm whenever possible, and SOF units should continue to periodically send operators to various civilian training venues to learn negotiation, sales techniques, cross-cultural assimilation and interpersonal skills. These venues should not be limited to one or two select options. Units need to survey the full spectrum of training possibilities and sample various options, including those available through universities and private companies, to help diversify their operators' frames of reference.

Many business firms send senior leaders to courses offering relevant skill sets. By attending the same courses, operators could gain a wider perspective of how someone can successfully or unsuccessfully employ the skills presented. For example, an operator recently mentioned that he attended a course conducted by the Harvard Program on Negotiation. The instruction was useful, but the greatest value was gained in observing and interacting with civilian executives or automotive union representatives. They attacked problems in a different way, which offered him a perspective beyond normal SOF exposure.

The military and SOF often use the phrase "train as you fight." SOF operates with a minimal footprint in politically sensitive and culturally varied locations solving ambiguous problems through an indirect approach. Cross-cultural interpersonal exposure to the other techniques mentioned in this thesis, beyond any second or third order benefits, would enable SOF to train as it fights.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This thesis has argued that influencing others is a keystone of success for SOF. Operators are continuously in relationships and partnerships with myriad organizations, both U.S. and foreign, regardless of mission type or location. The SOF community, and USASOC specifically, endeavors to conduct strategic influence through a global SOF partnership, to serve as the U.S. Army's experts in the human domain, to execute UW and to achieve success by, with, and through partnerships with foreign forces. Accomplishing these missions and optimizing SOF's success relies heavily on cross-cultural interpersonal skills. The first-hand examples of operator experience presented in this thesis reinforce that message with a 28 percent failure rate at the interpersonal level. Applying the interpersonal lessons and concepts proposed here may help to raise the bar and create new opportunities. The SOF mission depends on it; the operators deserve it.

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## APPENDIX A. ADDITIONAL CODING DATA

Tables 5-11 below provide a collective overview of the codes and families used to develop each theme indicated within this thesis.

Coding Process for Theme 1		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Genuine Behavior	Action legitimizes forces Action not words Appreciation for partner Appreciative partner Caring actions Compassionate effort Deepened friendship Desired long-term contact Distanced friendship Earning respect Family Feeling obligation to return help Frustration about being able to help Generous offer Genuine Care Genuine friendship Genuine interest Genuine interest in work at hand Giving not just taking Giving others credit Giving respect Going to bat for partner Good relationship enables critique Help offering Humility Importance of religious	Knowledge Importance of religious role Justifying concern Kind gestures Making partner feel comfortable Non-appreciative partner Offering a solution Partner gains credit Perceived alliance Perceived care Personal exposure Personal fascination with partner Personal loyalty Request for help Residual care Respect Saving face Setting aside differences Showing empathy Sincere effort Surging influence collectively Taking the blame Treating as equals Trust Trust built Trust issues Unlimited compassion Value of friendship
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Success in handling interpersonal engagements or influencing partners is highly reliant on the presence of real or perceived genuine human concern and interest. This was identified by every operator in over 50 codes ranging from humility, compassion, appreciation, respect, genuine interest, giving, helping, and the like. Reference term is Genuine Behavior.		

Table 5. Coding Process Example (Theme 1)

Coding Process Example (Theme 2)		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Gaining Perspective	Appealing to others' perspective(s) Area familiarization Asking questions Assessing the situation Closed-minded approach Concern over perception of action Conflicting allegiance(s) Conflicting interest(s) Frustration in understanding environment Introspective thought Knowing your strengths Lack of knowledge on country team structure Lacking perspective Listening Meeting expectations	Misleading information Misunderstanding perspective Ombudsman concept Open-minded approach Outside perspective Partner connectivity with populace Partner embarrassed Perspective justification Perspective of partners Perspective-taking Preconceived notions Self-appraisal Understanding larger context Understanding options Understanding partner's motivation Understanding environment Western viewpoint
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Taking a partner's perspective or broadening/challenging one's own – and related actions that aid in creating perspective, such as asking questions, listening, or developing dialogue – collectively serve as a major positive catalyst during interpersonal engagements, and as a learning tool to understand failed encounters. This was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents with over 30 subordinate codes, including perspective-taking, asking questions, listening, self-appraisal, and having an open-minded approach. Reference term is Gaining Perspective.		

Table 6. Coding Process Example (Theme 2)

Coding Process for Theme 3		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Mutual Assistance	Bond through hardship Common Ground Compromising to find a solution Connecting partners Creating common ground Emotional connection through hardship Face to face solution Hand in hand with partner Hitting partner targets Mediation effort	Mutual friendships Mutual learning Mutual likability Reciprocal care Reciprocal negativism Reciprocal value Retaliator exclusion Shared struggle Sharing Sharing concerns Values partnership
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Offering mutual assistance or shared involvement with partners, to include acting as a mediator between partners to enhance their mutual support, facilitates a higher level of collective understanding and positively impacts an individual's ability to influence others. This was identified by every operator in all 23 source documents with over 30 subordinate codes such as mutual learning, creating common ground, reciprocal value, and shared concerns. Reference term is Mutual Assistance.		

Table 7. Coding Process Example (Theme 3)

Coding Process for Theme 4		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Culturally Aware Behavior	Cultural similarity Cultural misinterpretation Cultural knowledge deficit Cultural flexibility Cultural difference Cultural context Cultural challenge	Collectivist cultural indications Military culture Foreign military culture Face importance Misunderstanding face Compromised authority Authority reinforcement
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Maintaining cultural knowledge and flexibility serves as an effective conduit in creating genuine interest and shared value, reinforcing successful relationships. This was identified by 19 operators and contains 20 subordinate codes such cultural challenges, cultural difference, sectarian rivalry, and authority reinforcement. Reference term is Culturally Aware Behavior.		

Table 8. Coding Process Example (Theme 4)

Coding Process for Theme 5		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Building Social Capital	Cultural similarity Cultural misinterpretation Cultural knowledge deficit Cultural flexibility Cultural difference Cultural context Cultural challenge	Collectivist cultural indications Military culture Foreign military culture Face importance Misunderstanding face Compromised authority Authority reinforcement
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Managing relationships that result in influence requires taking an approach that builds upon how a partner is perceived by others in the surrounding organization or community as well as themselves. This was identified by all 20 operators and contains 30 subordinate codes such as adaptability, boosting partner ego, humor, selling, and building others' social capital. Reference term is Building Social Capital.		

Table 9. Coding Process Example (Theme 5)

Coding Process for Theme 6		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Hanging Out	Attempt to dialogue Distance makes difficult Drinking with partners Extracurricular activity Frequency of contact Informal channels Language value Little interaction Living with partners	Meal sharing Pleasure based actions Relaxing opportunity Social activities Sports Strength of personal relationship Value of hanging out Value of meal sharing Valued socializing
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Learning about others through hanging out beyond work is a significant catalyst for successful cross-cultural interpersonal influence. This theme was identified by all 20 operators and contains 18 subordinate codes such as playing sports, sharing meals, drinking alcohol, and living with partners, among others. Reference term is Hanging Out.		

Table 10. Coding Process Example (Theme 6)

Coding Process for Theme 7		
The Family	Codes within the Family	
Overcoming Bureaucratic Constraints	Bypassing HN leadership for a solution Command pressure Constraints of low rank or experience Lack of continuity Less bureaucratic constraints Limited time and manning No career risk Outside prescribed duties Overcome bureaucratic constraints	Partner bureaucratic constraints Partner requests return Political barriers to helping partners Political constraints Pressure from higher Rank constraints Relationships overcome bureaucratic constraints Results of bureaucratic constraints Shifting U.S. priorities Transitioning Units Turnover Issues
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.		
<b>The Theme:</b> Overcoming bureaucratic constraints routinely encountered within our own system and that of our partners will reduce a large barrier to effective influence. This theme was identified by all 20 operators and contains 20 subordinate codes such as transitioning units, lack of continuity, and pressure from higher authority. Reference term is Overcoming Bureaucratic Constraints.		

Table 11. Coding Process Example (Theme 7)

Coding Process for Theme 8	
The Family	Codes within the Family
Multi Group Coordination	Deconflicting Between Partners Multi Group Coordination Mixed Groups
The information above was analyzed to create the following contextual theme.	
<b>The Theme:</b> Employment as a SOF operator requires ability to simultaneously manage relationships and influence with multiple organizations and individuals. This theme was identified by 17 operators in one code. Reference term is Multi-Group Coordination.	

Table 12. Coding Process Example (Theme 8)

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## APPENDIX B. ADDITIONAL FIGURES

This appendix offers additional supporting tables beyond those provided in the main text. The table below presents a review of data associated with the 96 stories collected of interpersonal engagement experiences by SOF operators.

STORY DATA OVERVIEW		
Story Type	Number of Stories	% of All Stories
Foreign Engagements	72	75
U.S. Engagements	24	25
Positive Outcome (Foreign Partner)	54	75
Positive Outcome (U.S. Partner)	15	62.5
Positive Process – Positive Outcome	63	65.6
Negative Process – Positive Outcome	6	6.3
Total Positive Outcome	69	71.9
Negative Outcome (Foreign Partner)	18	25
Negative Outcome (U.S. Partner)	9	37.5
Positive Process – Negative Outcome	1	1
Negative Process – Negative Outcome	26	27
Total Negative Outcome	27	28
Pre SOF Engagements	19	19.8
Iraq Engagements	42	43.7
Afghanistan Engagements	13	13.5
Other Country Engagements	41	42.7
Total Engagements	96	N/A
Engagements occurred in 23 total countries including 3 in the U.S. See Table 4 for details concerning engagements per country.		

Table 13. Story Data Overview

The following table presents a comprehensive list of subject data. No real names were used in this document in order to preserve anonymity of the subjects.

SUBJECT DATA FOR 20 OPERATORS INTERVIEWED							
SOF Organization		Rank and Total by Organization		Recent Units of Service			
U.S. Army Special Forces		16 (14 x MAJ, 1 x SFC, 1 x CWO3)		USASFC(A) x 1, SOTD(A) x 1, SWTG(A) x 2, 1 <sup>st</sup> SFG(A) x 2, 5 <sup>th</sup> SFG(A) x 5, 7 <sup>th</sup> SFG(A) x 2, 10 <sup>th</sup> SFG(A) x 2			
U.S. Army Ranger		1 (1 x MAJ)		75 <sup>th</sup> RGR(A) x 1			
U.S. Navy SEAL		3 (3 x LCDR)		NSWG1 x 1, USSOCOM x 2			
Rank	Years of Service	Years in SOF	Deployments	Months Deployed			
MAJ	10	4	4	29			
MAJ	11	5	4	36			
MAJ	12	6	4	29			
MAJ	19	5	6	42			
MAJ	12	6	2	29.5			
SFC	12	12	5	29			
LCDR	12	12	11	49			
MAJ	16	10.5	3	10			
MAJ	12	12	7	39.5			
CW3	17	14	13	64			
MAJ	15	7	5	48			
MAJ	10	5.5	4	24			
MAJ	12	4.5	6	42			
MAJ	11	5	6	31			
LCDR	14	14	15	60			
MAJ	12	6	4	31			
LCDR	11	11	4	33			
MAJ	11	5	5	20			
MAJ	11	6	4	29			
MAJ	21	8	5	38.5			
Years of Service		Years in SOF		Deployments		Months Deployed	
Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total
13.05	261	7.9	158	5.9	117	35.7	713.5

Table 14. Complete Subject Data

## APPENDIX C. RECOMMENDED READING

READING RECOMMENDATIONS		
Title	Author	Overview
<i>How to Win Friends and Influence People</i>	Dale Carnegie	The title says it all. Written in the 30s, but the techniques are justified and work well.
<i>Global Dexterity: How to Adapt your Behavior across Cultures Without Losing yourself in the Process</i>	Andy Molinsky	Explains how to identify minimal, reasonable efforts to adapt and work with other cultures.
<i>The Cultural Intelligence Difference</i>	David Livermore	Tips to assessing and improving your ability to effectively navigate other cultures.
<i>Say Anything to Anyone: 5 Keys to Successful Cross-Cultural Communication</i>	Gayle Cotton	Good examples on how to analyze and adapt to a situation to achieve success with other cultures
<i>In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia</i>	Edward Lansdale	Tangible examples of influence from possibly the best military advisor in history.
<i>The Ugly American</i>	Eugene Burdick William Lederer	Tangible story explaining how Americans are often perceived overseas and why that happens.
<i>A Bell for Adano</i>	John Hersey	Tangible story about an Army Major in WWII who earns the respect of a small Italian town. Demonstrates effective influence and advising.
<i>Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity</i>	Frank Barrett Ronald Fry	How to use questions effectively in creating capacity and developing organizational change.
<i>Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence</i>	Daniel Goleman Richard Boyatzis Annie McKee	How to understand and apply the foundational principles of Emotional Intelligence.
<i>Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In</i>	Roger Fisher William Yury Bruce Patton	Good foundational book on negotiation. Yury co-founded Harvard's Program on Negotiations.
<i>Confidential</i>	John Nolan	Effective elicitation techniques that sometimes aid in influence.
<i>Defense is from Mars State is from Venus: Improving Communications and Promoting National Security</i>	Rickey Fife	Understanding organizational cultural differences between DOD and DOS. PDF available via Google search.

Table 15. Recommended Reading

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## APPENDIX D. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the interest of exploring the value in identifying specific recurring interpersonal skills of Special Operations Forces (SOF) operators, we can turn to related research on the psychology of negotiations, cross-cultural behavior, and interpersonal behavior. Additional specific research reviews and offers instruction in skills that practitioners commonly employ in successful negotiations or rapport building. Numerous authors and experts have suggested that by learning and adopting specific behaviors, most people can acquire the skills necessary for successful rapport building or negotiation; these skills include mimicry, posture, attitude, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and understanding perspective, among others.<sup>66</sup> Many of these skills seem reasonably simple to understand and apply when one is merely reviewing them, but they can be difficult to employ or detect when they are applied in daily encounters. This raises the question of whether people have a genetic predisposition for these skills, whether they can be inculcated through practice and exposure, or whether some combination of the aforementioned avenues is most accurate. As an example, in *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell suggests that select individuals referred to as connectors, mavens, and salespeople have special traits that enable them to collectively influence social change.<sup>67</sup>

This leads to two questions of primary concern. Does conclusive research validate the possibility of a predisposed ability in these areas? Furthermore, to what extent can we identify recurring skills or attributes through the analysis of concrete encounters and use them to leverage improved capability in members

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<sup>66</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Pocket Books, 1936); Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Nicholas Boothman, *How to Connect in Business in 90 Seconds* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2002); Michael Brooks, *Instant Rapport* (New York: Warner Books, 1989); Tom Hopkins, *Selling for Dummies* (New York: Hungry Minds, Inc., 2001); and David Lieberman, *Get Anyone to do Anything and Never Feel Powerless Again* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002).

of the SOF force who lack a biological predisposition? This research effort suggests that these skills can be identified and recommendations for improvement can be developed to the extent they pose no risk to mission success. A review of the corresponding psychological research indicates the presence of additional, often more complex dynamics that can influence the outcome of interpersonal engagements, thereby requiring more complex behavioral manipulation beyond a simple overlay of certain skills.<sup>68</sup>

The understanding of individual interpersonal skills has a long history within the field of psychology. Negotiation and mediation, or arbitration, have been the principal tools for exploring related behaviors. Early studies on negotiation focused specifically on individual differences between involved parties on each side and how these might determine outcomes. Some instances highlighted the significance of individual differences, but they were inadequate for defining the true outcome of a scenario due to other environmental factors, such as the context for the scenario in question.<sup>69</sup>

Further studies concerning behavioral decision research (BDR) explored how negotiators and their opponents often deviate from what is perceived to be the rational thought process accorded to the situation. This research indicates that creating accurate descriptions of opponents has value over an assumption of their rational thought process.. In support of these findings, BDR argues that cognitive heuristics often lead to diversion from the rational thought process.<sup>70</sup> This applies most appropriately in the cultural context, where definitions of rational behavior may not align. Success or failure is often tied to culturally-shaped behavior. As Gladwell illustrates in *Blink*, people can be conditioned to make effective or destructive snap decisions or assessments.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley, "Negotiation," 279–314.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>71</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking within Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005).

Perspective is very difficult to grasp, especially when multiple interacting perspectives are in play. Understanding perspective is a significant dynamic identified by numerous research efforts as crucial to success in interpersonal engagements.<sup>72</sup> Related studies on two-party negotiations indicate that participants display a variety of consistent behaviors, such as failing to see the opponent's perspective, making false assumptions, and failing to realize the true flexibility of the situation and the possibility of mutual benefit.<sup>73</sup> Some negotiators have been consistently found to act in a less objective, more motivationally-biased manner. This motivational bias is known as egocentrism; the more each party possesses this trait, the more difficult an outcome of agreement becomes. Situations characterized by increased ambiguity show higher levels of egocentrism, whereas scenarios possessing greater symmetry, as in scenarios where the parties possess some understanding of each other, reveal fewer signs of egocentrism. In addition, when negotiators have a more accurate perspective of their opponent, they become more objective in their efforts to resolve the issue.<sup>74</sup>

Mental models also play a role in understanding how perspective, or the lack thereof, can impact a negotiation. A mental model is one individual's perception of the entire process and the perceived outcomes.<sup>75</sup> For example, studies show that regardless of the scenario, participants assume that their goals are in direct opposition to those of their negotiating counterparts, even in scenarios where shared interests also exist. Understanding other possible scenarios through the use of compared analogies showed success against the pure experience of sequential scenarios. Participants were then able to adapt

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<sup>72</sup> Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley, "Negotiation," 279–314; Bond and Smith, "Cross-Cultural Social and Organizational Psychology," 205-235; Dale Miller and William Turnbull, "Expectancies and Interpersonal Processes," *Annual Review of Psychology* 37 (1986): 236-237; Thompson, Wang and Gunia, "Negotiation," 491-515; Peter Carnevale and Dean Pruitt, "Negotiation and Mediation," *Annual Review of Psychology* 43 (1992): 551-552.

<sup>73</sup> Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley, "Negotiation," 282.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 284-285.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 287.

these analogies to better understand future scenarios and apply lessons. Similarly, people tend to exaggerate differences between themselves and their opponents based on mental models. Actions also differ based on an understanding of participant roles, such as friend or businessperson.<sup>76</sup> The process of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), developed to enhance organizational collaboration, reinforces the value of understanding perspective through asking questions to identify common, positive ground and clarify a path forward.<sup>77</sup>

Cross-cultural behavior makes each of these issues more complicated. Cultural differences are perhaps the most frequently discussed theme among the many challenging elements of cross-cultural negotiation. For instance, cultural differences can refer to the diverging worldviews of individualist cultures like the United States and collectivist cultures like the Philippines. In cross-cultural negotiations involving one party from each cultural type, the individualist places a higher value on solving the issue at hand, while the collectivist places more value on maintaining positive relations.<sup>78</sup> The collectivist prioritizing of relationship maintenance often involves indirect communication—sometimes perceived by individualists as deception—and is the source of what we know as “saving face.”<sup>79</sup> Other relevant dimensions of cross-cultural negotiation are communication context (unmentioned contextual value of conversation versus direct meaning of words used), power distance (position within a hierarchy), and time concept (polychronic versus monochronic).<sup>80</sup> Each of these variables requires an astute interpersonal navigator to detect and be prepared to adjust their own mental models to the environment. Typically, countries fall on opposite ends of the spectrum in more than one category of cross cultural negotiation,

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<sup>76</sup> Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley, “Negotiation,” 279–314; Bond and Smith, “Cross-Cultural Social and Organizational Psychology,” 205-235.

<sup>77</sup> Frank J. Barrett and Ronald E. Fry, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity* (Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications, 2008).

<sup>78</sup> Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley, “Negotiation,” 279–314; Bond and Smith, “Cross-Cultural Social and Organizational Psychology,” 205-235; Thompson, Wang and Gunia, “Negotiation,” 491-515.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley, “Negotiation,” 297-98.

thereby creating multiple opportunities for failure within a given scenario. These dynamics are also measured through a system known as self-concept clarity (SCC), a scale on which individuals from collectivist cultures are hypothesized to demonstrate lower values than those from individualist cultures, in which SCC is prized and pervasively articulated.<sup>81</sup>

These dynamics reinforce the idea that cross-cultural negotiation varies widely from same-culture scenarios. Research indicates that intercultural negotiations resulted in lower mutual value than those with intra-cultural groups. Participants identified this issue as a result of less accurate understanding of each other's priorities. This can be attributed to the previously mentioned concerns of perspective and mental models. Some studies suggest prescriptive advice, such as being prepared to assume other mental models. However, others questioned the ability of most people to separate from cultural grounding and change behavior to the extent required to make their situational outcome successful. In *Global Dexterity*, Andy Molinsky acknowledges this difficulty and identifies six key areas where cultural clashes can occur.<sup>82</sup> He then suggests a reasonable process for adopting minimal behavioral change to assimilate without losing one's own cultural identity.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, even within the specific field of cross-cultural psychology—which, both notably and similarly to traditional psychology, is dominated by Americans—there is an ongoing awareness of the potential influence of culture on research.<sup>84</sup> To confront these issues, this specialized field focuses on universals, which are demonstrated psychological principles that have survived the test of cross-cultural analysis.<sup>85</sup>

One related study concerning universals theorizes that a specific set of five dimensions can be used to assess and compare perceived personalities

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<sup>81</sup> Bond and Smith, "Cross-Cultural Social and Organizational Psychology," 205-235.

<sup>82</sup> Andy Molinsky, *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 48-50.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 5-182.

<sup>84</sup> Bond and Smith, "Cross-Cultural Social and Organizational Psychology," 205-235.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

from varied cultures. The five dimensions include extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.<sup>86</sup> Different cultures weigh the relative importance of each quality differently, which confirms the value of objectivity in dealing with other cultures. Further studies addressed the decision-making skills of managers within collectivist versus individualist cultures.<sup>87</sup> These studies found collectivists more apt to work well in teams and to consult leaders. Conversely, the individualists focused less on teamwork and were less likely to consult a supervisor.

Similar to the notion of mental models, outcomes in interpersonal actions have a high correlation to the expectations of the parties involved.<sup>88</sup> For example, people having phone discussions with women whom they believed to be attractive consistently assessed them as more sociable than those who were believed unattractive.<sup>89</sup> In short, humans show a pattern of ability to conform their behavior to achieve expected results, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Negotiations offer similar results, where action begets action. An opponent believed to be competitive, for example, begets more competition, which reinforces the cycle.<sup>90</sup> Although this appears commonly in research, it should be understood that disconfirming prophecies also exist; the outcomes are based on perceptions and expectations of each party and their reactions to the behavior of the other.<sup>91</sup>

Integrative negotiation techniques further explore the value of perception. When negotiating, a participant often incorrectly perceives what the other person wants, resulting in less than optimal outcomes for both.<sup>92</sup> This reconfirms that perspective and objectivity allow for more effective and integrated solutions.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>87</sup> Bond and Smith, "Cross-Cultural Social and Organizational Psychology," 221.

<sup>88</sup> Miller and Turnbull, "Expectancies and Interpersonal Processes," 236-237.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>92</sup> Thompson, Wang and Gunia, "Negotiation," 491-515.

Interpersonal relations have been assessed in terms of various forms of influencing factors. One commonly cited combination of tactics for success is behavioral synchronization and body mimicry.<sup>93</sup> Mimicry is another subtle form of placing oneself in the same interpersonal plane as another and working through body movement, tone of voice and nature of language.<sup>94</sup> On a different note, emotions also play a part in negotiation. Thompson, Wang, and Gunia's research indicates that one side is not affected by emotion of the other unless they have motivation to be so influenced.<sup>95</sup> These observations were focused on negotiations, whereas other observations focused strictly on relationship building were consistent in finding success with a friendly approach versus an angry or aggressive one.<sup>96</sup>

Collective identity is also an avenue of influence. People consistently identify more closely with others within their own perceived group, because this is seen as good for the collective in some fashion.<sup>97</sup> Collectivists focus on relational trust and value versus the actual profit or individual form of gain received from the outcome.<sup>98</sup> Collectivist sensitivity to out-group negotiation is, correspondingly, higher than that of an individualist.<sup>99</sup> Negotiation is sometimes assumed to be more successful for the party that retains information. However, research has indicated dyads that share information concerning the discussion will also have higher outcomes.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 499.

<sup>94</sup> Boothman, *How to Connect in Business in 90 Seconds*; Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*; Thompson, Wang and Gunia, "Negotiation," 491-515

<sup>95</sup> Thompson, Wang and Gunia, "Negotiation," 499.

<sup>96</sup> Boothman, *How to Connect in Business in 90 Seconds*; Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

<sup>97</sup> Thompson, Wang and Gunia, "Negotiation," 502.

<sup>98</sup> Thompson, Wang and Gunia, "Negotiation," 502; Michele Gelfrand, Miriam Erez, and Zeynep Aycan, "Cross-Cultural Organizational Behavior," *Annual Review of Psychology* 58 (2007): 579-514.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 570.

<sup>100</sup> Carnevale and Pruitt, "Negotiation and Mediation," 551-552.

In conclusion, successful management of interpersonal engagements requires not only precise knowledge of various behavioral dynamics, but also the ability to maintain a high level of objectivity as well as some level of behavioral control. Further studies of real-world interpersonal engagements conducted by special operators, in combination with psychological data concerning the training and selection of these men, will assist in better understanding the dynamics driving such scenarios. A refined appreciation for the interpersonal subtleties in action within a specialized SOF sample populace will ultimately improve operators' abilities to influence their counterparts, likely reducing risk while increasing mission success. This effort is further legitimized by research that identifies the successful interpersonal traits of contemporary special operators, or suggests some measure of implementation to influence force-wide effectiveness in related scenarios. Similarly, within SF, current selection procedures are heavily focused on eliminating those who do not already possess requisite baseline capabilities for training, as opposed to identifying and developing potential.<sup>101</sup> As a result, the process is disinclined to select "in" for certain skills or nascent abilities and does not currently have a procedure for measuring cross-cultural interpersonal skills.<sup>102</sup> The process does effectively identify a baseline presence of emotional intelligence or interpersonal skills. Although necessary and readily applicable, this baseline primarily reflects a candidate's ability to work effectively within a cohort of like personnel, and is insufficient for predicting or nurturing a capacity for handling the cross-cultural engagements required within this occupational realm.

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<sup>101</sup> Major, U.S. Army Medical Corps, Special Forces Group Psychologist and former 1<sup>st</sup> SWTG (A) psychologist (phone discussion with author concerning ability to psychologically assess SF operators with interpersonal skills, February 21, 2012); Captain R., 1<sup>st</sup> SWTG (A) psychologist (email to author concerning interpersonal skills evaluation within Special Forces Assessment and Selection, March 13, 2013).

<sup>102</sup> Executive summary of individual criteria and ratings for U.S. Army SFAS (email to author from SFAS commander, February 18, 2013).

## A. RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY:

For this thesis, the investigation into the human dynamics pertinent to interpersonal success as a Special Forces (SF) operator pursued a process known as thematic analysis, as described by Dr. Richard Boyatzis in *Transforming Qualitative Information*. This process allowed a methodological approach to qualitative data collection, which facilitated analysis in both qualitative and quantitative forms. Because this specific use of thematic analysis endeavored to analyze situations encountered by experienced operators, it lent itself towards an inductive approach.

The inductive approach was used to collect information provided by experienced SF operators at a specified level of detail, which facilitated the maximum extraction of correlative data for further analysis. When outlining effective methods for an inductive approach, Boyatzis recommends use of the critical incident interview (CII).<sup>103</sup> The CII is an interview method that extracts an extremely rich, detailed type of data that can then be used to gain insight into human experiences. This information is collected in a journalistic form, almost analogous to a movie script, in order to reduce the likelihood of excluding or distorting the experience due to bias or opinion of the person being interviewed.<sup>104</sup> While the applicability of this technique to SF personnel interviews concerning operational experiences seems readily apparent, to date no interviews have been found that extracted information at the level of detail required for such in-depth analysis.

CII products were used during this thesis for the analysis and extraction of themes. From these the intent was to derive a code for defining the interpersonal operator. At the most basic level, CII data was collected from scenarios in which personnel performed successfully, as well as from those in which they were unsuccessful. The latter category presents a unique challenge due to perceived

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<sup>103</sup> Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information*, 99-127.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.; Richard E. Boyatzis, *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), 50-53.

exposure risk. Interviews from each subset, successful and unsuccessful, were analyzed for presence of themes within their own cohort. This series of themes was then compared across subsamples. Correlation facilitated the demonstration of overarching themes with certain characteristics present in successful scenarios. Those that existed across all samples were further reviewed for the development of labels, definitions, indicators of presence and differentiation demonstrating level of commonality within each subsample.<sup>105</sup> Common themes across the subsets were used to develop a code. Once refined, this code endeavored to illustrate the traits possessed by an SF operator adept in interpersonal engagements.

Understandably, this process leaves some room for question due to the author's perceived ability to collect information that aligns with the research hypothesis. To assist in validating the process, CII's were recorded via audio device and transcribed verbatim for review of precise interview material. Additionally, the author received training in conducting the CII process by working alongside another trained practitioner, further helping to ensure the thoroughness, validity and objectivity of the information

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<sup>105</sup> Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information*, 29-53.

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